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INTRODUCTION.

THE book entitled "Acts of the Apostles" reports words as well as deeds. Indeed, the words of the Apostles were acts of brave testimony that the Church must ever hold in grateful remembrance. Words! only words! yet they shook the world. The sword in the hand has never gained such victories as the sword of the mouth. It was the only sword ever employed by the Lord Jesus Christ. He bore witness to the truth. He spoke words instinct with spirit and life. Simon Peter, indeed, seemed to attach some importance to "two swords" on the night of his Master's arrest, and actually drew one of them to defend Jesus. But the Lord calmly said—"Put up again thy sword into its place;" and never more do we hear of that Apostle touching "carnal weapons." He had what was far better—a tongue set of fire from heaven.

Our holy religion now rests on the word

written, but it was with the word spoken, *viva voce*, that it began. The house of Israel was moulded by what Moses and the prophets "spake" anterior to any record of their words in Books of the Old Testament; and in like manner the Church was founded and guided by word of mouth from Jesus and the Apostles many years before any book of the New Testament was composed.

To St Luke we are indebted for a report of oral addresses delivered by Apostolic lips on critical occasions. No doubt they are in most, if not in all, cases given in an abridged form, not *in extenso;* but the question is raised whether, even as abridgements, they are to be held authentic and read as representing speeches which were actually made. A startling and even shocking question to those who have never admitted into their minds the idea that the sacred books could be influenced, so far as the human composition of them is concerned, by the literary fashions of the times in which they were written. But intelligent readers who can distinguish between Divine inspiration and literary construction, know that every ancient as well as every modern book bears some stamp of its own

literary period; and, therefore, that it is a perfectly reasonable question, whether St Luke conformed to the fashion of the ancient historians in writing out speeches for the chief personages in his history. From Thucydides downwards the Greek and Latin annalists and historians freely drew on their rhetorical imagination, and put characteristic speeches as they thought proper into the mouths of eminent men. Must we think that St Luke adorned his treatise in the same manner? or may we rely on his having abstained from rhetorical invention, and having taken pains to ascertain and record exactly what the Apostle spoke?

Our persuasion is that we may so rely on the authenticity of the speeches in the Book of Acts. We think so mainly for the following reason:—St Luke had already written for Theophilus a memoir of Jesus Christ, and therein had reported many of the Saviour's words, and even discourses of considerable length. It is impossible to imagine that the Evangelist composed those sayings and ascribed them to Jesus. He could not have composed them if he had tried, for they were such words "as never man spake." He would not have composed them if

he could ; he had too much reverence to devise utterances for the Son of God. We feel quite sure that the words and discourses attributed to our Lord in the third gospel are honestly reported from the best sources of information open to the Evangelist—the memory, perhaps the written memoranda, of those who heard the Saviour speak. This habit of reporting speeches was therefore formed by St Luke in composing his first treatise ; and it is reasonable to suppose that he carried it into his second treatise also. It was constructed throughout in the same spirit of literary conscientiousness and reverence. The earlier speeches which are given—those of St Peter and St Stephen—could be recovered from those who heard them, and who probably wrote them down at the time of their delivery. That of Stephen St Paul heard and never forgot. Then the later speeches in the book—those of St Paul himself—the historian could, without much difficulty, obtain in an authentic form, for he was much with the Apostle as an intimate and trusted friend.

In some instances the report is confessedly incomplete ; as on the day of Pentecost, when St Peter's address is given up to a certain

point, and then we are simply told that "with many other words he testified and exhorted them." In other cases the speech ends abruptly, being cut short by the arrest of the speaker or a tumult in the audience. Take, as examples, St Peter's address in Solomon's Porch, and that of St Paul on the stairs above the Court of the Temple. When the speaker was heard without interruption the length of the address was determined by the occasion. Speeches in self-defence were judiciously short. Discourses of an expository and didactic character were judiciously long. The greatness of the theme deserved, and the large scope of the argument drawn by the Apostles from ancient Scripture required, that time should not be grudged. So St Paul continued his speech at Troas until midnight, and held the attention of the Jews at Rome "from morning till evening."

The tone of all the speeches combines fearlessness and reverence. Fearlessness became the speakers as champions of a world-subduing faith. Reverence became them as messengers charged with a heavenly communication to mankind, and guided by the same Spirit that moved the ancient prophets. They were

"serious in a serious cause." To rhetorical skill or finish the speeches make no claim, yet they are never unskilful or awkward. As extemporaneous addresses delivered by Jews and Galileans they do not offer themselves for comparison with the carefully constructed orations of the Greek and Roman masters of eloquence; yet some of them, *e.g.*, St Paul's address at Athens, and his speech before Agrippa, tried by any just standard of criticism, will be pronounced oratorical masterpieces.

The Apostles, indeed, had a transcendant qualification, and one that never failed in an emergency. A heavenly wisdom ordered their thoughts and arranged their words. A heavenly fire, kindling their intellect and heart, glowed upon their lips. It was not so much they who spoke, as the Holy Ghost.

I.

ST PETER TO THE BRETHREN AT JERUSALEM.

"And in these days Peter stood up in the midst of the brethren, and said (and there was a multitude of persons *gathered* together, about a hundred and twenty), Brethren, it was needful that the scripture should be fulfilled, which the Holy Ghost spake before by the mouth of David concerning Judas, who was guide to them that took Jesus. For he was numbered among us, and received his portion in this ministry. (Now this man obtained a field with the reward of his iniquity; and falling headlong, he burst asunder in the midst, and all his bowels gushed out. And it became known to all the dwellers at Jerusalem; insomuch that in their language that field was called Akeldama, that is, The field of blood.) For it is written in the book of Psalms, Let his habitation be made desolate, and let no man dwell therein; and His office let another take. Of the men therefore which have companied with us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and went out among us, beginning from the baptism of John, unto the day that he was received up from us, of these must one become a witness with us of his resurrection."—Acts i. 15–22.

THE place was an upper chamber in Jerusalem. The time fell in the interval between the ascension of Christ and the descent of the Holy Spirit. The audience consisted of about one hundred and twenty, who acknow-

ledged Jesus as the Christ. Devout women, including the Blessed Mother of our Lord, may also have been present; but, if so, according to Eastern custom, they were not counted. This audience was in a high condition of spiritual receptivity, having been for several days occupied in united prayer, waiting for that power from on high which their Master had promised. The speaker was Simon Peter, the leading spirit among the apostles, to whom all were ready to concede the right of initiation, though no one ascribed to him,—nor did he ever claim,—a right of supremacy.

Cut off by their faith in the Crucified One from the confidence and sympathy of the general population, those disciples drew the closer to one another in brotherly love. They are described as "the brethren," and the apostle addressed them by that name—no mere formal phrase at such a time, but one that meant much, and touched a chord of feeling in every heart.

Then the speaker plunged at once into his theme, dwelt on the sad death of Judas, the traitor, and developed a proposal which the occasion seemed to him to justify and require. In this, however, he showed no peremptoriness,

but laid before the brethren the grounds on which his proposal rested, and asked for their concurrence.

The number of the apostles had been twelve, evidently to correspond with the number of the tribes of Israel. The Lord Jesus had spoken of them as destined to sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. St Peter pointed to the fact that this number of completeness was now broken by the fall of Judas; and yet he thought not so much of the vacant throne as of the deficient witness. He had well learned the last lesson which the Master had impressed on the disciples before his ascension, that the power about to come upon them was not to lift them up at once into places of dignity in a kingdom restored to Israel, but to fit them for bearing witness to Him "in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the uttermost parts of the earth." No longer insisting on his own preconceptions, as in former days, St Peter meekly followed the indication of his Lord's will; and, therefore, it was to the necessity, not so much of filling the twelfth throne in the future kingdom, as of completing the band of apostolic witnesses for immediate service, that

he called the attention of the assembled brethren.

The speech was confined to the one point, and was, therefore, brief and practical. Indeed, it was even more brief than the ordinary English bible indicates, if we take the details of the suicide of Judas, in the 18th and 19th verses, to be no part of the speech, but a parenthetic explanation inserted by the historian St Luke. The Revised Version adopts this view, and has enclosed those verses within marks of parenthesis. In this the revisers have perhaps exceeded their proper function as translators, but we incline to think that they are right. It does not seem at all natural for one speaking in the city of Jerusalem to tell how Judas bought a field and how he died—matters which must have been perfectly well known to his audience; to talk of "the dwellers at Jerusalem" as if he were a hundred miles away; and to translate the word *aceldama* to hearers who must have understood it as well as himself. But it was quite natural and very proper for St Luke to furnish such explanations to his friend Theophilus.

Let us set down in order what we find most

worthy of consideration in the first apostolic speech.

1. *The becoming spirit in which the traitor is referred to.*—There is no breath of angry passion, no excited protestation of horror at his crime, or of exultation over his dreadful end, no confident placing of Judas with Lucifer in lowest hell. Simon Peter remembered that he had himself played an unworthy part on the night of his Master's arrest and trial; and though his fault had been a denial through weakness—not a crime of deliberate betrayal for the sake of a contemptible bribe, as was the case with Judas,—yet the apostle was so far admonished and subdued by the recollection of his own misconduct, and of the flight of his colleagues, as to put away all harshness in speaking even of the miserable traitor. "He was guide to them that took Jesus." "He was numbered among us, and received his portion (κλῆρος, lot) in this ministry." This lot he forfeited for filthy lucre's sake. "He fell away that he might go to his own place."

Enough. The case was too grievous and tragical for many words. He is not the wisest or the best man who hurls the hardest words

at sinners; and he is not the most judicious servant of Christ who metes out to his fallen fellow-servant the most rigorous condemnation. St Peter in no wise palliated the crime of Judas. He knew that it would have been better for that man to have never been born. But he cast no execration on his memory, as the Jews have thrown stones with curses on the grave of Absalom, the ungrateful assailant of Christ's great ancestor. Judas had gone to his own place, said the apostle, with a sigh rather than a frown. It was the Lord alone who could judge him, and ought to judge him. What need that men should add their many stripes of censure, or cast their stones of angry incrimination!

2. *The manner of accounting for events connected with the death of Christ.*—St Peter had learned this from the Lord himself. Both before His betrayal and after His resurrection, Jesus had impressed on the disciples His obligation to suffer at Jerusalem, on the ground that He must accomplish the Divine counsel of redemption, and fulfil the intimations of ancient scripture regarding the Messiah, His sorrow and His victory. The apostle Peter

at one time could not admit this into his mind, and tried to dissuade the Master from going up to Jerusalem to finish His course. But now he saw the whole matter from the Lord's point of view, and in the same light looked at the treason of Judas as a link in the chain of events which fulfilled the high purpose of God. This consideration did not palliate the traitor's guilt any more than it excused the chief priests who bribed the infatuated man; but it accounted to the christian company for such a crime being permitted to occur, and to succeed in its object.

In the first sentence of the speech David is mentioned as the prophet by whose mouth the Holy Ghost had spoken from ancient days "concerning Judas." Quotations are then given from the book of Psalms; the servant following herein the example of the Master, who cited the 41st Psalm on the night in which he was betrayed, in allusion to the ingratitude and treachery of Judas Iscariot.* In the sorrow of King David was shadowed forth

* See John xiii. 18. Mark the significant omission of the words "whom I trusted," which are found in the original passage, Ps. xli. 9.

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the deeper sorrow of Christ; and in the treason of Ahithophel and his despairing death were shadowed forth the treason and despairing death of the Fallen Apostle. Guided by this, St Peter quoted two other Psalms of the same cast with the 41st. They are the 69th and 109th. From the former, he inferred the utter rejection of Judas. From the latter, he argued that the charge committed to Judas as one of the twelve should now be transferred to another.

Our minds may perceive little need for quotations and arguments from prophetic odes in such a matter. The proposal to fill up a vacant place may seem to us to have quite sufficient support in considerations of practical expediency. But we must judge the speech by the position of the speaker and his audience. They were at a juncture which made every indication of their duty from ancient Scripture most important and precious. Knowing that their Lord had at all hazards fulfilled the Scriptures, and realising their close relation to Him, they were bound to be careful that they too, in continuing the witness to Him on the earth, fulfilled the Scriptures. They also must have foreseen that they would be stigmatised as sectaries and

renegades by the Jewish authorities; and therefore they were bound to make it sure that they were not departing from those sacred oracles which were the glory of their nation, but were obeying, according to those oracles, the will of the God of Israel.

3. *The view here given of the qualifications of an Apostle.*—He must have been of the company who followed Jesus, and must have seen Him after He had risen, so as to testify to the truth of His resurrection. These conditions surely preclude any continuance of the apostolic office beyond the first century, and any restoration of the Apostolate in modern times. In a secondary sense it is fair enough to speak of Patrick as the apostle of Ireland, Boniface as the apostle of Germany, Ansgar as the apostle of Scandinavia; but in the strict sense of the term there are no successors of the original apostles. They were a band of witnesses on whose well accredited personal testimony to Jesus Christ the Church was built: as is indicated in the vision of the Holy City—"The wall of the city had twelve foundations, and, on them, twelve names of the twelve Apostles of the Lamb." *

* Rev. xxi. 14.

Paul of Tarsus was subsequently made an apostle. He had not been of the company with Jesus in Galilee and Judea, but he saw the ascended Lord that he might witness, not on hearsay, but on personal knowledge, to the fact of His having risen from the dead. Some, indeed, have maintained that St Peter and the other apostles, with the hundred and twenty brethren, all mistook the path of duty on this occasion, and improperly raised Matthias to the apostolate. It is alleged that their conduct was precipitate, and that if they had patiently waited, they would have discovered that the Lord intended the twelfth place to be occupied by Paul. In support of this, it is pointed out that there is no record of any apostolic work done by Matthias, whereas Paul showed all the signs of a great apostle.

With this view we have no sympathy, and cannot admit that it has any ground of probability in its favour. It seems to us almost a preposterous suggestion that the very first act of the Christians at Jerusalem, and that a unanimous act, determined on after much prayer and searching of the Scriptures, was a presumptuous mistake. This is unlikely, and almost incredible

in itself; and happily there is not the slightest hint in the New Testament that any such error was committed. Then it is most unreasonable to base any argument on the non-mention of the acts of Matthias in St Luke's history; for in that respect he is in the same position with Andrew, Philip, Thomas, Bartholomew, Matthew, and Simon the zealot—six undoubted apostles, of whose acts the New Testament affords no record. What then was the position of St Paul? In nothing was he "behind the very chiefest apostles;" but he was not one of the twelve apostles of the circumcision, who are to judge the twelve tribes of Israel. His was a separate appointment as apostle to the Gentiles; and in that capacity he accomplished his work, and will enter into his reward.

After each of the apostolic speeches, St Luke tells us something of the effect produced on the audience. In the present case prompt action was taken in accordance with St Peter's advice. Two brethren, who possessed the necessary qualifications, were put forward; but no vote was taken in the assembly, as between two candidates. The decision was taken by lot,

according to an Old Testament method of appeal to Jehovah. This has been accounted for on the supposition that the meeting was in much doubt as to which of these honoured brethren ought to be preferred; but we would rather trace it to a conviction in the minds of all who were present, that an apostle required to be designated by the Lord Jesus Himself. Apostolate could not be conferred by the Church on whomsoever it pleased, as could the permanent offices afterwards instituted, viz., the Presbyter-Episcopate and the Diaconate. There was no scruple about "looking out" and ordaining deacons, or choosing and ordaining elders; but the twelfth apostle could be chosen and appointed only by the Lord, who had chosen and appointed the other eleven. The expression "be ordained" in the Authorised Version (verse 22) is quite inaccurate. All that the apostle said was that "one must become a witness" of the resurrection of Christ. Ordination to the apostolate by Church authority there could not be, any more than there could be ordination to the function of a prophet. In accordance with this principle, we afterwards find St Paul solicitous to have it understood in all churches that he had received grace and

apostleship not from men, but from Jesus Christ the Lord. He begins several of his epistles by describing himself as "an apostle of Christ Jesus through the will of God."

Matthias, then, was not ordained, but simply "numbered with the eleven apostles," being recognised from that day forward as clothed with the same authority from the Lord Jesus with which they were invested. And now all things were ready. The twelve living stones were laid in order in the foundation of the Church—Peter, the Rock-man, being first in the rank: and the time was at hand when Christ should build thereon that Church against which the gates of Hades cannot prevail. The twelve witnesses of His resurrection were ready to open their testimony so soon as they should receive the promised Power. Till the descent of the Power from on high, there was no more speaking. It was a time to pray and to wait. The initial organisation was complete. The twelve apostles, the brethren, and the devout women were together, and of one accord. One thing only they lacked. But it was everything if they hoped to succeed. It was that vitalising energy of the Holy Ghost without which all ecclesiastical organisation is weak indeed.

II.

ST PETER TO THE MULTITUDE ON THE DAY OF PENTECOST.

"But Peter, standing up with the eleven, lifted up his voice, and spake forth unto them, saying, Ye men of Judæa, and all ye that dwell at Jerusalem, be this known unto you, and give ear unto my words. For these are not drunken, as ye suppose; seeing it is but the third hour of the day; but this is that which hath been spoken by the prophet Joel: And it shall be in the last days, saith God, I will pour forth of my Spirit upon all flesh: and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams: Yea and on my servants and on my handmaidens in those days will I pour forth of my Spirit; and they shall prophesy. And I will shew wonders in the heaven above, and signs on the earth beneath; blood, and fire, and vapour of smoke: the sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before the day of the Lord come, that great and notable day: And it shall be, that whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved. Ye men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God unto you by mighty works and wonders and signs, which God did by him in the midst of you, even as ye yourselves know; him, being delivered up by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye by the hand of lawless men did crucify and slay: whom God raised up, having loosed the pangs of death: because it was not possible that he should be holden of it. For David saith concerning him, 'I beheld the Lord always before my face; for he is on my right hand, that I should not be moved: Therefore my heart was

glad, and my tongue rejoiced; moreover my flesh also shall dwell in hope: because thou wilt not leave my soul in Hades, neither wilt thou give thy Holy One to see corruption. Thou madest known unto me the ways of life; thou shalt make me full of gladness with thy countenance.' Brethren, I may say unto you freely of the patriarch David, that he both died and was buried, and his tomb is with us unto this day. Being therefore a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him, that of the fruit of his loins he would set one upon his throne; he foreseeing this spake of the resurrection of the Christ, that neither was he left in Hades, nor did his flesh see corruption. This Jesus did God raise up, whereof we all are witnesses. Being therefore by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost, he hath poured forth this, which ye see and hear. For David ascended not into the heavens: but he saith himself, The Lord said unto my Lord, Sit thou on my right hand, till I make thine enemies the footstool of thy feet. Let all the house of Israel therefore know assuredly that God hath made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified. Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and the rest of the apostles, Brethren, what shall we do? And Peter said unto them, Repent ye, and be baptised every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ unto the remission of your sins; and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost. For to you is the promise, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call unto him. And with many other words he testified and exhorted them, saying, Save yourselves from this crooked generation."—Acts ii. 14–40.

WE are struck first with the calmness, then with the concentrated force of this address. How difficult the task which St Peter undertook! He had to speak on the spur of

the moment, and in the midst of a scene of great agitation; for the little band of Christians, a hundred and twenty in number, was surrounded by a vast throng of Jews and Proselytes, native and foreign, excited as only an Eastern crowd can be. The sight of such a surging multitude, with their loud hum of amazement, not unmingled with ominous cries of mockery, might well have daunted, or at least disconcerted the Galilean fisherman. It is no easy thing for the most practised orator to catch the ear, and hold the attention of a confused crowd, unfavourably disposed to the cause he seeks to advocate. Shakespeare means us to recognise consummate skill in Mark Antony's handling of the Roman citizens at Cæsar's funeral; but he used flattering words, and he spoke in order to rouse the people against the assassins of Cæsar, not against themselves. The speaker on the day of Pentecost had to address the crowd at Jerusalem on a theme which could not be welcome to them, and to stir their consciences to self-condemnation. Yet we see no trace of hesitation, no symptom of embarrassment. The speech was as well conceived and compacted as if it had

been premeditated for weeks. It contrived not to irritate but to arrest and pierce the soul. It soothed the tumult of unfriendly excitement, and stirred a tumult of convicted conscience.

An opening for the apostolic address was made by the rude jeering of some persons in the crowd as to the source of that ardour which glowed in the faces and uttered itself in the words of the hundred and twenty brethren. Probably these were home born Jews, who, not recognising the languages spoken as did the foreign Jews and Proselytes, began to mock and say, "These men are full of new wine." On this, Peter stood up with the other eleven apostles, and these appear to have continued standing during the address to indicate that what their leader spoke was to be taken as spoken by all. It was the speech not so much of one apostle as of the twelve.

The charge of intoxication was easily disposed of. It was a fair specimen of the capacity of carnal men to judge those who are spiritual. But St Peter brushed it away with a sentence. It was enough to point out that it was but the third hour of the day. What Jew would have drunk wine at all on such a morning

as the Pentecost, and before the morning sacrifice had been offered! And even if one or two could have been found so lost to shame, how absurd to allege that here were one hundred and twenty of such shameless persons, all carefully gathered together in a group! Even the heathen reckoned it disreputable to drink strong wines in the morning. A passage in Cicero has been pointed out, in which the revelry at Antony's villa is described as beginning so early as nine o'clock—*ab hora tertia;* but this was regarded as the foolish excess of debauchees.

This reference to the hour sufficed to show the extreme improbability and utter unreasonableness of the charge of intoxication made by the mockers in the crowd. But the complete refutation of it was furnished by the whole tone and tenor of St Peter's address, which was calm and well considered to a marvel. It showed that he and his companions were certainly "not filled with wine, wherein is excess."

They were "filled with the Spirit." The apostle gave this as the true explanation of that sudden fervour, and proceeded at once to illustrate and support his statement by a felicitous quotation from one of the ancient prophets.

He knew well that in order to convince either one person or many it is necessary to proceed on some common ground, and the common ground for his purpose was Holy Scripture. No one in that multitude, however prejudiced or impatient, could object to the citation from Joel. Every one felt bound to listen while St Peter quoted from memory a fine passage from that venerable prophet.

It predicted an outpouring of the Spirit of God at some future date. In Joel we read "afterwards." St Peter quoted it thus, "In the last days," as pointing to the age or dispensation which was then opening, and which is to close with the second advent of Christ. The prophet said that the effusion of the Spirit would be "upon all flesh." Doubtless he thought, and the apostle also thought of all flesh of Israel—all ages and both sexes—sons and daughters, old men and youths, menservants and maidens. We know that the Spirit was to fall on the Gentiles also, and Simon Peter soon learned this, but at Cæsarea, not at Jerusalem. What he saw and taught on the day of Pentecost was the beginning of a fulfilment of Joel's prophecy in the descent of

the Holy Ghost on men and women of Israel. It was the sign of a new era. It was the inauguration of a time, the length of which no man could define, but certainly ending with a "great and terrible day of the Lord."

Such was the exordium of St Peter's speech. We can see the mockers silenced, some of them at all events, let us hope, ashamed. We can see surprised and anxious faces turned on the band of apostles, as their spokesman, so aptly quoting Scripture, announced that the scene before them was no mere casual phenomenon, but was due to a Divine visitation predicted by one of the earliest prophets. The crowd ceased to sway and shout, listening to the calm, clear, strong statement which carried with it such a ring of certainty.

Then the speaker, pursuing his advantage, addressed himself to the theme which occupied his own heart and the hearts of all his colleagues. The Spirit had come upon them, not that they might speak of Him, but that they might preach Christ, and preach with power. Accordingly, after his introductory explanation to avert prejudice, St Peter began to speak to the multitude regarding Jesus, who

had been crucified some weeks before, at the time of the Passover. He declared that Jesus had been raised from the dead and exalted to heaven; and sought to establish by quotations from the Holy Writings which all the Jews and Proselytes professed to reverence, that this Jesus was both Lord and Messiah. It was a very difficult thing to do, and full of risk to the apostles and all their little company; but St Peter accomplished it with what we have already described as a combination of calmness and force, amply proving that the Spirit now resting on him and his brethren was no Pythonic phrenzy, but the "Spirit of power and love and a sound mind."

In the speeches of the apostles we shall often find a striking resemblance to the manner of their Lord in this respect, that they never dragged in their great theme abruptly or awkwardly, but introduced it with a happy art, finding their starting-point in some saying addressed to them, or some quotation from the Old Testament which they had made. Thus, in the present instance, St Peter found a starting-point for preaching Jesus in the concluding words of the passage he had cited from Joel,

"Whosoever should call on the name of the Lord shall be saved." Who was the Lord, whose "great and notable day" should terminate the dispensation of the Spirit? St Peter and his colleagues were prepared to say and prove that it was no other than Jesus of Nazareth who had so recently been rejected and crucified. And then for the first time the flagrancy of their treatment of Jesus was charged on the conscience of the Jewish people; while, for the first time also, the fulness of the Gospel was made known to them as a proclamation of the Saviour in His humiliation and exaltation, and an assurance of salvation through faith in His name.

Alike in manner and matter, the speech was admirable. There was consummate tact in advancing under the shelter of quotations from the Old Testament, which the audience was bound to receive with deference, and then leaping out, as from under cover, at the right moment, with bold unsparing language that cut their consciences like a sword. And all the while, as to the substance of the address, the speaker turned neither to the right hand nor to the left, lingered over no side issues or

subsidiary points, but bent all his energy on the establishment by infallible proofs of his one main proposition, that Jesus was Lord and Christ.

All who were present had heard of this Jesus. Most, if not all, of them had seen Him. Not a few of them had joined in the cry, "Crucify Him!" That passionate demand for His death had not been, however, a really spontaneous cry of the people. It had been stirred up by the ruling classes to glut their malice. And now that a little time had passed, and hot blood had been allowed to cool, there must have been sore misgivings in the hearts of many of the citizens, as well as of the visitors to Jerusalem, regarding the justice of that hasty crucifixion of the Prophet from Galilee. The apostle soon dispersed those misgivings. He reminded his hearers of "the mighty works and wonders and signs" by which God had accredited His Prophet. He appealed to the multitude as to their own knowledge of those things; and their silence intimated that they could not and did not dispute the fact that many signs of a great Prophet of God had appeared in Jesus.

Having gained the point, St Peter proceeded to show who the Prophet Jesus was, by reference to His (1) death, (2) resurrection, and (3) ascension. He was the Christ.

1. The Crucifixion of the Prophet was fresh in every memory. Was this fatal to a claim of Messiahship? The time had been when Simon Peter would himself have said so; but now he saw otherwise, and stood there prepared to show that the condemnation of Jesus to ignominious death, far from telling adversely, formed an essential part of the proof that He was indeed the Christ. It was in God's purpose that the Christ should "suffer many things, and be killed," and it was predicted in the ancient oracles. Jewish teachers had turned away their eyes from every indication of a suffering Messiah, and looked only on the intimations of His power and glory. But none the less were those intimations contained in the Book of God, none the less was their fulfilment secured by His "determinate counsel." Therefore was Jesus delivered into the hands of those who hated Him; and they, pursuing their own envious and cruel purpose, crucified Him by the hand of "men without the law"—the heathen

Roman soldiers. But it was really on the Jews and their children that the blood of the Just One lay. St Peter regarded the multitude before him as all accessory to the great crime, and had the courage to say, face to face with the crowd, "Ye did crucify and slay."

2. Then, in a breath, holding his audience still and subdued under the power of his words, the speaker announced a fact which gave a new turn to the whole history in the Resurrection of the Crucified One. "Whom God raised up, having loosed the pangs of death." This, indeed, had been announced in Jerusalem immediately after the Sabbath of the Passover; but a counter story had been set afloat by the rulers to the effect that the disciples of Jesus had secretly abstracted His body from the tomb. These conflicting rumours had left the whole matter in a haze of doubt. And now, for the first time, the assertion that God had raised up Jesus was made plainly and publicly in the hearing of thousands of Jews.

But, before adducing witnesses to prove the resurrection, St Peter referred again to the Old Testament. With a fine skill which the Holy Ghost had taught him, he prepared the Jews for

receiving evidence in support of the fact, by showing that it was an event far from incredible, since it had been clearly foretold in one of the prophetic Psalms. He quoted the 16th Psalm, as previously he had quoted Joel, from the Greek version, and pointed out that David had spoken of one who should emerge from Hades, and that, too, so soon after death, that his flesh had seen or suffered no corruption. This could not refer to King David himself, for he was dead and buried, and there at Jerusalem was his undisturbed sepulchre. The apostle maintained that the Psalm referred to the Christ, and meant that He, having died and been buried, should, through resurrection, find for Himself, and open to others, the path of life.

Of course this did not prove that Jesus was that Christ. But, if it could be proved that Jesus had risen soon after His death and burial, His fulfilment of this oracle would go far to place it beyond doubt that He was the very Messiah, the hope of Israel.

And then the proof was adduced. Pointing to the apostles who stood beside him, and perhaps to the rest of the Christian company also, St Peter said boldly and decisively, "This Jesus

did God raise up, whereof we all are witnesses." They who stood there in face of the multitude, giving such testimony at risk of their lives, had seen Jesus alive after He had been buried: and therefore He must have been raised up. They had spoken to Him and eaten in His presence; and some of them who could scarcely believe it true, had been at pains to verify the fact, and were convinced of it. How could any fact of the kind have better attestation? Those witnesses were men of intelligence and character. They knew their Master's person well and intimately, and might be trusted to identify Him. They knew that He had died to bear witness to the truth, and could not be so perverse as to think that they could promote His glory by publishing a lie. They had not themselves expected His resurrection, and so could not have been deluded by strong anticipation, or made eager desire father to the thought. Moreover, the evidence which they relied on was not confined to one appearance which might possibly be resolved into a dream or hallucination. They saw the Lord at different times and places. Now one or two saw him, now several, now hundreds at once, during a space of nearly six

weeks. There never has been, there is not now, any way of setting aside such testimony, except the way of maintaining that no evidence whatever can prove such a prodigy. Acknowledge that God may and can raise the dead if He pleases, and that such resurrection is capable of proof on the part of those who have seen the risen one, and you must allow that it is absolutely certain that God raised up Jesus at Jerusalem. Jesus, therefore, was the Christ whose delivery from Hades David prophesied.

3. The argument had to be carried one step further; and the speaker, who evidently studied compactness of statement, not knowing how long the crowd might continue to listen, proceeded at once to say, not merely that the crucified Jesus was raised up, but also that the risen Jesus was exalted by the right hand of God. So far as their eyes could testify to such a fact, the apostles might have said of this also—"We are witnesses," for they had seen their Master taken up from the earth, till a cloud received Him out of their sight.

On this point, too, St Peter found support in the Old Testament. It had been foretold that One who was entitled to be addressed as

Lord should ascend and sit at the right hand of God. The reference was to the 110th Psalm, "Jehovah said to Adonai." Every one knew who was meant by Jehovah: but who was Adonai? David could not have meant himself, for he was not his own Lord; far less could he have given such a title to any conqueror among the kings of the earth. The spirit had inspired him to sing thus of the Lord Christ who has left this world and gone to the Father, and is set down with the Father on His throne.

But how could it be shown that Jesus had so ascended, and was therefore at this point also proved to be the Christ? The apostles could not and did not say that they had seen Him in heaven. They had stood gazing up into the sky till they could discern His rising form no more. The proof of His ascension was before the eyes of the multitude then and there. On the followers of Jesus, and on them only, had descended the new energy from heaven, which they affirmed to be the power of the Holy Ghost. This was what Jesus of Nazareth had promised to send to them from the Father; and the great event of the day was evidence that He had ascended to the right hand of God,

and had received of the Father this blessing now so copiously poured forth on His assembled disciples and friends.

Thus the proof was completed at every point. There was no declamation in St Peter's address but compact statement and close reasoning, leading up to the conclusion that God had made the crucified Jesus both Lord and Christ. It pierced the souls of the multitude with a tremendous force of conviction. And now the little band of Christians, with awed and grateful hearts, beheld the crowd no longer mocking, but subdued, ashamed, conscience-stricken. Pricked in their hearts, many cried out—"What shall we do?" The dreadful deed you speak of is done and cannot be undone! Is there any thing possible to us still? Or is this crime past remedy?

A welcome interruption to the speaker! It showed St Peter that he had struck the right chord, and that the Holy Spirit was speaking through him to the people. It enabled him to follow up his address with a very pointed application of its truth, and a very earnest appeal to all who heard him. They could not undo their own act of ingratitude and cruelty to the Holy

One. The only reversal of that act which was possible had been effected already by the operation of God in raising up Jesus from the dead. But this they might do, and should do without delay—turn to Him whom they had rejected, honour Him whom they had despised, and obtain through His name the same blessing as had fallen on the Christian company before them. They should repent and be baptized. Not improbably some of them had been partakers of John's baptism unto repentance ; but their conduct had shown that they were far from righteousness. Therefore they were now called to a deeper repentance and a more powerful baptism.

"*Repent.*"—It was not enough to be pricked in heart, uneasy, perplexed, alarmed. Repentance is more than vexation with one's self, or even poignant sorrow. The apostle bade the Jewish multitude reconsider the whole matter in which they had blindly followed the lead of the priests and elders, and so change their minds regarding the Nazarene, and consequently change their attitude towards Him and His cause.

"*And be baptised every one of you unto the remission of sins.*"—This implied that they should

believe, and confess their faith—for faith is always allied with repentance unto life, and is the instrument of forgiveness. Those who sincerely repented of their rejection of Jesus, must now believe in Him as the Christ; and in token thereof were called to join the company of His followers by openly receiving that baptism into the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, which, before His ascension, He had authorised His apostles to administer.

The consequence of this would be, that they would obtain not only pardon of their grievous sin against the Lord, but the gift of the Holy Ghost; for the promise of this blessing was to their nation first—to them and their posterity—though also, God be praised, to the Gentiles—"as many as the Lord our God shall call."

Then followed other words of exhortation, not reported. It is always the expository and argumentative substance of a discourse that is best worth preserving—not the hortatory. But St Luke sums up the appeal in these words—"Save yourselves from this crooked generation." This epithet the Lord Jesus had more than once applied to the Jewish people; and now the apostle saw in the light of His Master's

rejection and death, how true was the charge which it expressed. Their whole behaviour to Jesus showed them wrong-headed and perverse. The best thing that a man of that generation could do for himself was to escape from it, to renounce hostility to Jesus of Nazareth, and join the new fellowship which was actuated by quite another spirit, for it had the baptism of the Holy Ghost.

Such was the speech or preaching of St Peter on the day of Pentecost; and the result was glorious. The fisher of men let down a good net into the deep, and caught a great draught —drew to the shore of faith and peace three thousand souls. He wrought no miracle to astonish and impress them. It was better that no sign or prodigy performed by the apostles should interfere with the direct and solemn application of truth to the conscience on that eventful day. He performed no ceremony. The notion of a Christianity that trusts to ceremonial and celebration was quite foreign to the apostolic conception. The speaker prevailed by the word of his testimony. The three thousand felt the power of the truth and yielded to it—the Spirit of the Lord disposing and en-

abling them so to do. Thus they repented, believed, were baptised, were pardoned, were quickened to newness of life.

In one day! The day of the Jews' harvest home became a day of the ingathering of those who were to be "a kind of first fruits of God's creatures," and the manifestation of the power of Jesus Christ, now Lord of the harvest, to encourage and reward His labourers. It was the typical and significant day of our dispensation, a day which should not stand alone, but should be expected to repeat itself again and again. True, there cannot be a second or a third descent of the Holy Spirit, any more than there can be a second or a third incarnation of the Son. But the Church should ask and look for a continuance of the mighty working of the Holy Ghost, and so for conversions by thousands. The Church wants no other means of increase than those by which it was founded—(1) the fire of the Holy Ghost, and (2) the testimony of anointed witnesses in sound speech that cannot be gainsaid, testifying to Jesus, the Saviour, that He is the Christ of Israel, and the Lord of all.

III.

ST PETER TO THE PEOPLE IN SOLOMON'S PORCH.

"And as he held Peter and John, all the people ran together unto them in the porch that is called Solomon's, greatly wondering. And when Peter saw it, he answered unto the people, Ye men of Israel, why marvel ye at this man? or why fasten ye your eyes on us, as though by our own power or godliness we had made him to walk? The God of Abraham, and of Isaac, and of Jacob, the God of our fathers, hath glorified his Servant Jesus; whom ye delivered up and denied before the face of Pilate, when he had determined to release him. But ye denied the Holy and Righteous One, and asked for a murderer to be granted unto you, and killed the Prince of life; whom God raised from the dead; whereof we are witnesses. And by faith in his name hath his name made this man strong, whom ye behold and know: yea, the faith which is through him hath given him this perfect soundness in the presence of you all. And now, brethren, I wot that in ignorance ye did it, as did also your rulers. But the things which God fore-shewed by the mouth of all the prophets, that his Christ should suffer, he thus fulfilled. Repent ye therefore, and turn again, that your sins may be blotted out, that so there may come seasons of refreshing from the presence of the Lord; and that he may send the Christ who hath been appointed for you, *even* Jesus: whom the heaven must receive until the times of restoration of all things, whereof God spake by the mouth of his holy prophets which have been since the world began. Moses indeed said, A prophet shall the Lord God raise up unto you

from among your brethren, like unto me; to him shall ye hearken in all things whatsoever he shall speak unto you. And it shall be, that every soul, which shall not hearken to that prophet, shall be utterly destroyed from among the people. Yea and all the prophets from Samuel and them that followed after, as many as have spoken, they also told of these days. Ye are the sons of the prophets, and of the covenant which God made with your fathers, saying unto Abraham, And in thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed. Unto you first God, having raised up his Servant, sent him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from your iniquities."—ACTS iii. 11–26.

IN many respects this speech resembles that of the same apostle on the day of Pentecost. It was delivered to an excited crowd, and on an occasion which rose suddenly. Yet it is well conceived and well compacted, and indicates a speaker self-possessed, or, what is even better, possessed and guided by the spirit of wisdom and of power. It has a tone quite as deep as that of the previous speech, with which we compare it, and even a further reach of thought.

On the former occasion, St Peter had the eleven apostles standing beside him, as joining in the testimony. In this instance he had with him only the apostle John, his special friend, whose silent but courageous sympathy sustained and fortified his spirit. To show that there

were two witnesses to Jesus Christ, though only one speaker, St Peter spoke in the plural. "Why fasten you your eyes upon us?" Of the Prince of Life "we are witnesses."

Not only was the address now before us similar in style and manner to that which had been delivered on the day of Pentecost; but, when we study the matter, we find that, though the latter speech was no mere repetition of the former in respect of thought, it followed exactly the same track.

I. *An explanatory introduction.*—On a former occasion St Peter found his "door of utterance" through a foolish and malicious gibe which had been cast at the christian company, ascribing their spiritual enthusiasm to the excitement of wine bibbers. In the present instance, he found it through a mistaken admiration exhibited towards him and his colleagues by the bystanders, who attributed the healing of the cripple at the temple to their power or holiness. The apostles earnestly disclaimed the wonder-working faculty. St Peter had been careful to say to the lame man, "In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk." He now explained to the people that the power

dwelt in Jesus Christ, and was called into exercise on earth by faith in His name.

The man on whom the cure was wrought had probably lain by that door of the temple for many months, if not years, for he was laid there daily to ask alms. If so, he must have often seen Jesus and the disciples as they went in and out; and yet he obtained no healing, because he had no faith in the power of the Prophet of Nazareth to raise him up. But, on this day, the faith of the two apostles drew forth power from the Lord; and the cripple also, assisted by the words of St Peter, and encouraged by the grasp of his right hand, believed, and rose to his feet. So the glory of this act of healing was due to Jesus only; and St Peter laid this down as an excellent starting point for further discourse about the wonder-working Jesus.

At the same time he was careful to put the fact beyond cavil or question. The man who had been cured so suddenly was no stranger, but one whom all the people knew. The cure was complete, for he now had "this perfect soundness." And all who stood by were claimed as witnesses, for the thing was done

"in presence of you all." What an advantage the appeal to the spectators gave to the apostles in their subsequent defence before the Sanhedrim, the next chapter will show.

2. *A declaration concerning Jesus as fulfilling the Scriptures of the Old Testament.*—In the former address, the apostle had gone back in his quotations to the Psalms and the book of Joel; in this he went back to the patriarchs, and cited the words of Moses, and appealed to all the prophets, from Samuel downwards. So doing, he faithfully expressed the mind of his Master, who did not wrench away his Jewish and Galilean disciples from the reverence which was due to the Scriptures that their fathers honoured, but built all His claims and doctrines on those Scriptures, and showed that the psalmists and prophets had prepared the way for Him, and the patriarch Abraham had rejoiced to see His day.

Such is the course which must always be followed in teaching Christianity to a Jew. The utmost pains must be taken to remove the impression that a son of Abraham who acknowledges Jesus as the Christ apostatises to a new religion, and deserts the faith of the

patriarchs and prophets of Israel. And it must be held and proved that the Jew who becomes a Christian follows the faith of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob far more closely than a Jew who is not a Christian, and pays a more intelligent homage to Moses, and Samuel, and all the prophets.

St Peter maintained that it was the God of the patriarchs, the Portion of Israel, who had sent Jesus to bless His people; and described Jesus as the Servant of Jehovah—a title given to the Messiah in the latter part of the book of Isaiah. But how could this be? How could it be credited that the rulers and religious leaders of the people had been fatally mistaken about this Jesus, and only a few men and women from Galilee had known Him? The apostle felt that he had to meet the difficulty: and he met it by saying that the people of Jerusalem and their rulers sinned in ignorance when they rejected Jesus, and that this ignorance did not contradict but rather fulfilled ancient oracles which foretold that the Christ of God must suffer. He appealed to his audience in regard to the character and life of Jesus, that these were in no respect unworthy of One who should be the

Servant of the God of their fathers. He had done nothing worthy of death. On the contrary, He was the Holy and Righteous One, and they had deeply sinned, though sinned in ignorance, when they extorted from the Roman governor sentence of death against Him, preferring as an object of clemency such a criminal as Barabbas. One was Prince of Life; the other a destroyer of life; and they chose the latter. Jesus, who came to save men's lives, had his own taken away; while Barabbas, who had violently taken away life, had his own spared.

It is of some importance to observe that such a vindication of Jesus before a multitude in Jerusalem was possible so soon after His crucifixion. Holy and blameless indeed must His life have been, else some one surely would have disputed the claim so boldly advanced in His behalf, and would have alleged some fault or moral defect to show that He was not so very pure or righteous. Depreciation of lofty characters is sweet to baser natures. How can we account for the fact that no one challenged the apostle's words in praise of Jesus, except on the ground that the knowledge and conscience of

all admitted them to be absolutely true. We have already said that before the day of Pentecost there must have been strong and painful misgivings among the people of Jerusalem as to the justice of the crucifixion of the Galilean Prophet at the recent feast of the Passover, and what occurred at Pentecost must have seriously increased those misgivings. Had it not been for these, the apostle could scarcely have so plainly stigmatised the crucifixion as a national crime without raising a tumult of anger.

At the same time, he showed that this maltreatment of the Servant of God in no degree invalidated His Messianic position, but rather confirmed it. He was the prophet foretold by Moses. He was the glory of that race of Abraham in whom all the families of the earth were to be blessed. But He must needs be rejected and slain. "The things which God foreshadowed by the mouth of all the prophets, that the Christ should suffer, He thus fulfilled."

3. *An announcement of the exaltation of Jesus.*—In this respect also, St Peter closely followed his own Pentecostal speech. The time had not yet come for teaching the sacrificial character of the Lord's death, or the redemptive

virtue of His blood. Probably the conceptions of such truth formed by the apostles themselves were still vague and indefinite. They referred to His suffering, not in order to glory in the cross as did St Paul at a later period, but to point out that the suffering was the necessary prelude to His exaltation, and that the rejection of their Master by the rulers and people at Jerusalem was no indication that He had been rejected by God; nay, that such sentence of rejection had been divinely reversed by the restoration of Jesus from the dead, and His elevation to heavenly power and dignity.

The people of Jerusalem were not asked to believe this without proof. Of the resurrection of Jesus the apostles tendered themselves as witnesses. There stood Peter and John, who had seen the empty tomb, and had looked upon and conversed with the Lord after He had risen. They were willing to be questioned and cross-questioned on the facts. And they were prepared, at whatever risk to themselves, to affirm the resurrection as a thing of which they were absolutely sure. Of the elevation of their risen Lord to power and glory in heaven they could not testify, further than say that they

had seen Him ascend from the earth till lost to view among the clouds. But the healing of the cripple on that day through faith in the name of Jesus tended to prove both that the Saviour lived, and that He was clothed with power. It was not a dead Prince or Lord, but a living and a mighty One who had wrought the instant cure.

The meanings which underlie the crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus Christ, and the results which issue from these facts, may be more fully developed in modern teaching than in the first addresses of apostolic preachers; but the facts themselves must retain their place as central in all Christian testimony. It is a vain imagination that the statement of such facts has been superfluous or fallen out of date, and that the power of Christianity now consists solely in its inculcation of a pure morality, and an unselfish ideal of life. It has such a lesson to teach, such a pattern to display, in Jesus of Nazareth; but surely it is necessary to explain who He was, and whither He has gone. It also enforces its lesson, and the imitation of its pattern, by motives more powerful than any other religion supplies. It lays on the hearts of

Christians the constraining love and moral authority of Jesus Christ; but, for the full action of such motives on the will, it is necessary to show that Jesus Christ died, and why He died—that He rose, and why He rose. So, in order to reach the moral effect which is so much desiderated, we must continue to relate the facts which formed the staple of the earliest Christian preaching, that Jesus died and rose again, that He suffered and so entered into glory.

4. *A call to repentance in order to remission of sins.*—This too was after the pattern already set in the speech on the day of Pentecost. "Repent! for ye have done evil! Change your minds concerning the deed done at the Passover, and concerning Him whom ye then denied and slew! And turn ye! for in rejecting this Jesus ye have departed from the God of your fathers, and refused Him of whom Moses and all the prophets testified." Stier tersely explains the two terms which were used, in these words:—"Repentance is the negative element, the penitent aversion to the bygone wickedness through an acknowledgment of what is right. Conversion is the positive

element, a believing turning to the future good through confidence in mercy." *

Pressing on the consciences of his hearers the fearful wrong that they had done, the apostle showed a kindly wisdom in admitting at the same time all that could be urged in their behalf. It was true that in ignorance they had done it. The Jewish multitude had no clear conception of the heavenly origin and dignity of Jesus. The Roman officers and soldiers had no conception at all. They all had acted capriciously and cruelly; but they had not wittingly rejected and crucified the Messiah. Thus they had committed not a presumptuous sin, but a sin of ignorance. And the apostle encouraged the Jews to repent of it, by a promise that their sin would then be pardoned. He used the expression "blotted out," with allusion apparently to the ancient mode of writing on tablets covered with wax. If the scribe wished to obliterate any part of the record, he had but to invert the *stylus* in his hand, smooth the soft wax, and remove all trace of the writing. So, if the people would repent of their deed, and turn to God, He would obliterate the hand-

* Stier on the Words of the Apostles, *in loc.*

writing which was against them, blot out the record of their sin. It was meant, not that God would cover their sins with the virtue of their repentance, but that, on their repentance, He would cover and expunge their sin for His own name's sake.

No man can really cover his own sin. No angel can blot it out. Sterne wrote as a sentimentalist, not a divine, when he described the recording angel as he wrote down a profane expression, dropping a tear upon the word, and blotting it out for ever. The Lord sends angels on His errands of mercy and of judgment, but when forgiveness is to be bestowed, He takes it as His own prerogative. "I, even I, am He that blotteth out thy transgressions for Mine own sake, and will not remember thy sin."

5. *A glimpse of times of restitution.*—At this point the second speech to the people went far beyond the first. Possibly the apostle gave some such glimpse into the future on the day of Pentecost; but the reporter thought it enough to state that "with many other words he testified and exhorted them, saying, Save yourselves from this crooked generation." On that great occasion all attention was absorbed in guiding

to the Saviour, and baptising the thousands whose hearts had been pricked. But now that a second opportunity was given to him, St Peter more distinctly indicated the hope for the future which cheered his own spirit and the hearts of his apostolic brethren.

The Authorised Version has an unfortunate rendering—"When the times of refreshing shall come" (v. 19). This seems to put off the forgiveness of sin to some distant period, whereas pardon is immediate on repentance and faith. The Revised Version has it correctly—"That so there may come seasons of refreshing from the presence of the Lord."

The mention of "seasons of refreshing" (v. 19), and "times of restoration" (v. 21) recals the words which passed between the Lord Jesus and His apostles before the ascension. They asked whether He would at that time restore the kingdom to Israel. In reply He told them that it was not for them to know the times and the seasons. The power they were about to receive would qualify them to do the work wanted in their own age—to witness to Him far and near. Then, when He had ascended, "two men in white apparel" assured them that the

Lord would in like manner return from heaven. No doubt the apostles expected that He would soon return.

We must remember that Simon Peter was speaking on Jewish ground to a Jewish audience. His mind dwelt on the hope of Israel as set forth in the Scriptures of the prophets, from Samuel downwards. They foretold a time when the land should have rest, and, after long vicissitude and oppression, the people should sit at peace. No doubt the prophets wrote of favour to the Gentiles also; but as yet St Peter knew not the purpose of God concerning the union of Jews and Gentiles in one Church; nor had he a clear conception of that inheritance laid up in heaven, of which he afterwards wrote in his first epistle. His mind was occupied with the restoration of the kingdom to Israel, and the accomplishment in Palestine of all the things

> Foretold by prophets, and by poets sung,
> Whose fire was kindled at the prophet's lamp.

It was the apostle's conviction that the happy age for Israel would be introduced by the return of the Lord Jesus from heaven; and therefore he preached that the men of Israel should turn to the Lord whom they had re-

jected, in order that He might soon descend from heaven, and institute His kingdom of peace. While He had been with them they had not known Him, and therefore had forfeited the things which belonged to their peace. Now that He was withdrawn from them let them turn to Him whom they had pierced, that so He might the sooner return and make all things new, and the Messianic age, so long foretold and hoped for, would at once begin.

So the apostle spoke according to the light which he then possessed. He was quite unaware of the length of time which was to elapse before the Saviour's return. In the last chapter of his second epistle—the last thing we have from him—we see how he thought of the second advent after many years. He then perceived that the Lord tarried, not with reference to the Jews merely, but for the sake of all mankind, "wishing, not that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance." He also came to know that larger hope of which St Paul wrote—the hope of a restoration of all things in earth and heaven, and Christ as the glorious Head. But though his thoughts needed widening, the Apostle Peter was quite correct in sub-

stance in the language he addressed to the people of Jerusalem. And the lesson is good for Gentile Christians as well as Jews, viz., that the way to prepare and hasten the coming of the Son of Man is to repent of our sins against Him, and pray to Him, "Come, Lord Jesus; come quickly!" Then when He has come He will bring in the reign of righteousness and peace, of which we have heard so much from the sweet harp of prophecy.

St Peter was still preaching Christ to his audience, and explaining to them that God had sent His Servant first to them, the men of Israel, with the benevolent purpose of turning them away from their iniquities, when he was roughly interrupted by the Jewish authorities. He was arrested along with his companion, St John, in order to answer to the Sanhedrim for such public teaching. But the preaching was not without great reward. "Many of them that heard the word believed, and the number of the men came to be about five thousand."

A modern preacher of Christ may not be stopped by violent hands, but he may be unexpectedly silenced by disabling disease, or may

have one, or at most two, great opportunities as Peter had in Jerusalem, and never have so wide a door of usefulness again. Let him on every occasion, great or small, so "redeem the opportunity," and speak the truth so plainly and so earnestly, that, at what time soever his voice may be silenced, the word of the Lord may still "have free course."

IV.

ST PETER TO THE SANHEDRIM.

"Then Peter, filled with the Holy Ghost, said unto them, Ye rulers of the people, and elders, if we this day are examined concerning a good deed done to an impotent man, by what means this man is made whole; be it known unto you all, and to all the people of Israel, that in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom ye crucified, whom God raised from the dead, even in Him doth this man stand here before you whole. He is the stone which was set at nought of you the builders, which was made the head of the corner. And in none other is there salvation: for neither is there any other name under heaven, that is given among men, wherein we must be saved."—Acts iv. 8-12.

WHEN arrested by the temple guard, the Apostles Peter and John were obliged to spend a night "in ward," pending their arraignment before the Jewish Council in the morning. How vividly must it have recalled to their minds the night, then so recent, when their Master was seized by the guard, and after a sleepless night, was brought before the Council in the early morning, and pronounced worthy of death! At that time they were not able to

drink of His cup or be baptised with His baptism: but now they were able. Out of weakness they were made strong, and showed a glorious example to all who in after times should be called to suffer as Christians. They took their places in the very front of the long historical procession of confessors and martyrs for the Lord Jesus.

When the morning came, the Sanhedrim assembled in force. The high-priestly family was there, headed by the aged Annas. It was he who, with his son-in-law Caiaphas, had been most responsible for the condemnation of Jesus; and the sight of these two men in their places of authority might well have struck a chill to the hearts of the two followers of Jesus. The two great sects of the period were represented in the Council, and, however they differed from each other, were equally hostile to the name of the Prophet of Nazareth. The Sadducees, to which sect the priests belonged, were especially incensed at the preaching of our Lord's resurrection from the dead, because it contradicted one of their leading tenets. The Pharisees, if they did not occupy the highest seats, were the more numerous party, and though they

admitted the possibility of a resurrection, had their own reasons for refusing to believe that Jesus had risen, and were determined to suppress the testimony to that effect, which was making such a stir in Jerusalem. They had felt the sharp edge of our Lord's warnings and reproofs, had bitterly resented His teaching, had repeatedly sought to seize Him, being prevented only by fear of the multitude who regarded Him as a prophet, and had been the most active in planning and accomplishing His capture in the garden of Gethsemane. Therefore, while the Sadducees were annoyed at the apostolic witness to the risen Jesus, the Pharisees were vexed that the crucified Jesus, whose rejection they had so anxiously contrived, should be preached and honoured in the very courts of the Temple.

Brought into the presence of this High Court, the two apostles were interrogated upon the healing of the cripple on the previous day. The fact of the cure could not well be disputed, for the man who was healed entered the council chamber, and stood with the apostles, a witness not to be shaken; but the prejudice in the minds of the councillors was shown in their

avoidance of any acknowledgment of the act of healing, merely using the phrase, "Ye have done this." They also betrayed their hostile feeling to the prisoners, by affecting to take them for sorcerers or diviners, who had wrought a cure, real or apparent, by some magical incantation—"By what power, or in what name, have ye done this?" The object apparently was to entrap the prisoners into an admission that they had practised divination in the name of another than Jehovah, in which case they might be sentenced to be stoned to death.

It was in answer to such an inquiry, and with full cognisance of such a deadly peril, that Simon Peter spoke for his companion and himself. And what a speech! How admirably compact, and nobly courageous! Remember that but a few weeks or months before, this man had been so alarmed at the imputation of being a follower of Jesus, as to deny Him even with oaths; and now see him stand, calm and intrepid, before the whole Sanhedrim, and speak even to the Chief Priests of what they were least willing to hear. The change in the man cannot be otherwise accounted for than by the fact which the historian affirms,

that Peter was "filled with the Holy Ghost." So was accomplished the Master's promise, "I will give you a mouth and wisdom which all your adversaries shall not be able to withstand or to gainsay."

This speech of St Peter, being not only short, but also very clear and direct, does not require much exposition.

The apostle asked for what reason he and his colleague were thus seized and interrogated. With what error or offence were they charged? Was this judicial inquiry all about a good deed done to an impotent man? What fault in that? Must one ask leave of the Council before doing a kindness to a poor son of Israel? And why such vague language about the deed? St Peter brought it out roundly and distinctly, whether the Council liked it or no, that the cripple was undoubtedly healed. Twice he said it, "This man is made whole." "This man stands here before you whole."

Thus about the thing which had been done, there must be no mistake. The only question that could be raised was in reference to the healing power; and the apostle proceeded to show that this was no magical charm or divina-

tion. He had spoken to the cripple in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth; and the healing power had issued from that Holy One whom the priests and rulers of the Jews foolishly imagined that they had for ever disgraced and destroyed. One can see the frown gathering on their faces, and the light of love and courage brightening the countenances of the two apostles at the mention of the name of Him whom that very Council had so recently condemned.

Not knowing how long he might be permitted to speak, St Peter packed into the space of one or two sentences, and spoke promptly, what he had to say to the Council regarding the sin of rejecting Jesus, and God's sublime reversal of the unjust sentence by raising up the rejected and crucified One to be Prince and Saviour. He had already gone over this ground in a more deliberate manner in his two speeches to the multitude; but now for the first time he had the opportunity to make this statement to the very persons who had played the chief part in the great crime committed at the Passover—who had plotted against the life of Jesus, bribed Judas to betray Him, pretended to find Him

guilty of blasphemy, and then sent Him to Pilate on a charge of high treason, and insisted on His being crucified.

That the crucifixion was of their procuring, though carried out by the Roman authorities, those Sanhedrists could not deny, and did not care to deny. But St Peter indicated an aspect of the case, which, if true, was very serious for them. They had professed to act as men zealous for the honour of God, and shocked at the blasphemous claims put forward by the Prophet of Nazareth, who, as they alleged, was no prophet, but a deceiver of the people. But if God had accepted Him whom they had rejected, and raised up Him whom they had put to death, it followed that they did not know the mind of God: they were spiritually blind as well as envious and cruel. And the apostles were there to testify fearlessly that God had raised up Jesus from the dead. It was useless to tell them the story that the dead body had been stolen and hidden away. They had seen Him alive after His resurrection.

But how could such a thing be? How improbable that the leaders of the nation should

all have failed to recognise the Messiah, and only these fishermen and a few other private persons taken his part? One can imagine members of the council ready to exclaim, as Simon Peter's bold words sounded through the chamber—"The thing is incredible, impossible. This is the holy Sanhedrim, filled with men of reputation, who know the Scriptures, and are presided over by the High Priest. It cannot be that such a court should have so terribly misjudged the character and claims of Jesus, and put to death that Christ for whose coming so many generations in Israel have waited and prayed!" The apostle anticipated this incredulity, and quoted from the Psalter to show that such a rejection of the Messiah was not merely possible, but actually foretold in the Scriptures.

The suggestion, doubtless, was taken from the apostle's recollection of his Master's language to those chief priests and elders a few days before His crucifixion. He then quoted to them the words of the 118th Psalm:—

> The stone which the builders rejected,
> The same was made the head of the corner:
> This was from the Lord,
> And it is marvellous in our eyes.

The priests and Pharisees at that time did not

clearly understand the quotation, but they perceived that it was directed against them, and were all the more incensed against Jesus, and bent on His destruction. But Simon Peter remembered the quotation, and now repeated it, pointing the charge directly against the Jewish authorities in whose presence He stood. "Set at nought of you builders." It was great plainness of speech. "Your religious position, O Sanhedrists! is admitted. You are the husbandmen of the vineyard who have killed the Heir. You are the builders, bound by your offices to erect the spiritual temple of the Lord, and you have erred at the very foundation, and by your wicked prejudice have set at nought Him who is the true Stone of Israel."

Certainly those who have taken St Peter himself for the foundation of the Church have not been misled by him; for both in speaking and in writing* he laid special emphasis on the fact that the Lord Jesus Christ, and none but He, is "the chosen corner stone, the sure foundation." Wherever in the New Testament a fundamental position is assigned to one apostle,† or to the twelve,‡ or to the apostles

* 1 Pet. ii. 4-8. † Matt. xvi. 18. ‡ Rev. xxi. 14.

and prophets together,* it is evidently ascribed to them as bearing that original witness to Christ on which the Church rests; and so the truth is only made all the clearer that—

> Christ is made the sure foundation,
> And the precious Corner Stone;
> Chosen of the Lord, and precious,
> Binding all the Church in one.

One sentence more and the apostle has finished his speech. But he felt that he must say it—he must preach the gospel to the Sanhedrim, so as to be clear of the blood of all who heard him. In the spirit of his Master, he wished to do good to those who despitefully used him; and, after the manner of his Master, he rose from the consideration of an act of bodily healing to the thought of moral and spiritual healing, or salvation. To set Jesus Christ at nought as they had done, and were still doing, was the way to destroy themselves and their city. To have faith in His name, as the two apostles had, was the way to be saved and to save others. Thus, while the council sought his hurt, St Peter sought their salvation; while the council put him to the question as for life or

* Eph. ii. 20. 1 Cor. xii. 28.

death, he put before them a higher question of life or death, salvation or perdition, to be determined by the attitude they should thenceforth assume toward Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom they had crucified but God had raised from the dead.

"And in none other is there salvation; for neither is there any other name under heaven, that is given among men, wherein we must be saved." It was on this sentence that Bengel wrote his "Examination Sermon before Ordination." He was only in his twentieth year; and the sermon, which is extant, bears marks of inexperience, but it breathes, as did Bengel all his life long, a spirit of ardour towards the Saviour; and the discussion of the text is prefaced with this short prayer—"O Lord Jesus Christ! whose name is as ointment poured forth, most salutary and refreshing, mercifully grant us all to experience its grace and sweet savour, that, being strengthened by its mighty power, we may zealously follow Thee in life and death, through honour and dishonour! Amen."

So Jesus Christ was preached in the most difficult spot that the preacher could have occupied—the Council Chamber of the Jews—

preached to the very men who were most guilty of His blood. St Peter had not only no fear, but also no desire to retaliate, no word of menace, no thirst for revenge. He did not even petition for his own discharge and that of his fellow-apostle from custody. He forgot it in his zeal for his Master's glory as a Saviour, and his intense longing that even these Sanhedrists might receive salvation through the Saviour's name. And with a fine union of courage and humility said not "*ye* must be," but "*we* must be saved," including in one view all who were gathered together in the chamber, from the high priest downwards, with the apostolic prisoners and the police who guarded them, and the man who had been healed. Through Jesus Christ alone must we, or any of us, be saved.

N.B.

It is a great saying, and one that has vastly widened its application since it was spoken at Jerusalem, for Jesus Christ has now been preached in many lands and for many centuries. How God will deal with nations and tribes that have not heard of Jesus Christ and His power to save, this saying does not determine. Such a problem had no place in the

thoughts of the apostles on that day. Enough for their purpose, as also for ours, to say that those to whom Christ is preached may and must be saved only in and through His name.

Mark the effect of this brave and holy speech. After the addresses of St Peter to the multitude we hear of conversions by the thousand; but these Jewish officials were not at all so open to conviction. Self-righteous Pharisees, and sceptical Sadducees of any nation are not easily converted.

Unwilling to go into the pith of the matter, the council occupied itself with questions on the surface. How were those men—mere laymen, so to speak—so bold in their august presence! Had they not been? Yes; they recognised them (John was known to the High Priest) as having been among the Galilean companions of Jesus. And then came the lame and impotent conclusion: Let the affair be hushed up! And such has often been the owlish wisdom of personages high placed, but timid about the spread of truth and knowledge. New facts are inconvenient; let them be ignored. Fresh light is a disturbing element; let it be put safely under a bushel.

But men who thus arrange to stifle what they do not wish to admit, know little of the force of truth, or the loyalty to it which is the passion of noble minds. Peter and John made a most memorable answer to the ordinance of silence enjoined by the Sanhedrim. "Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you rather than unto God, judge ye: for we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard." Well for us, and for all the world, that those witnesses could not be brow-beaten, those preachers could not be silenced. The testimony which they would not abandon has gained the day, and become the creed of all Christendom. It is Peter and John who are strong to-day; Annas and Caiaphas who are weak. Christianity does not stand at the bar of a Jesus-rejecting Judaism to receive sentence. On the contrary, it summons such Judaism to answer for itself. If Jesus of Nazareth was not the Messiah, who is and where is your Messiah, ye men of Israel! Has not this Jesus done what you have scarcely attempted to do—turned the Gentiles from their idols, and spread over all the world a knowledge of your Scriptures, and

a reverence for the law, the psalms, and the prophets? Has He not saved; is He not now saving thousands from their sins; and is not His the dominion that goes to the uttermost parts of the earth? What think you of the conduct of your chief priests and rulers in taking away His life, and preferring to Him a bandit like Barabbas, a destroyer of life, and not a saviour? And what have you to say for your continued rejection and hatred of One whom all the world recognises as the greatest son of Israel who ever lived? When will you see what is so obvious to all others who have ever read the history, that Peter and John were right, Annas and Caiaphas wrong? Jesus of Nazareth is the Saviour of men, and you, even as we, if saved at all, must be saved through His name.

V.

ST PETER AT CÆSAREA TO A GENTILE COMPANY.

"THE word which he sent unto the children of Israel, preaching good tidings of peace by Jesus Christ (he is Lord of all)—that saying ye yourselves know, which was published throughout all Judæa, beginning from Galilee, after the baptism which John preached; *even* Jesus of Nazareth, how that God anointed him with the Holy Ghost and with power: who went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil; for God was with him. And we are witnesses of all things which he did both in the country of the Jews, and in Jerusalem; whom also they slew, hanging him on a tree. Him God raised up the third day, and gave him to be made manifest, not to all the people, but unto witnesses that were chosen before of God, *even* to us, who did eat and drink with him after he rose from the dead. And he charged us to preach unto the people, and to testify that this is he which is ordained of God *to be* the Judge of quick and dead. To him bear all the prophets witness, that through his name every one that believeth on him shall receive remission of sins."—ACTS x. 36–43.

THE Lord gave to Simon Peter "the keys of the kingdom of heaven." They were not keys of heaven, the apostle being porter at the gate, as later superstition fancied. They were not keys of the Church, militant or tri-

umphant, but keys of the kingdom of heaven on earth. The use made of them we learn from this history. St Peter used a key at Jerusalem to open the kingdom of heaven to the Jews; a second at Samaria, to open the same kingdom to the Samaritans; a third at Cæsarea, to open it to the Gentiles. These were from his point of view the three divisions of the human race. So, in the three places which have been named, the apostle preached the word of life, and the Holy Ghost fell on those who heard it.

We know that the Lord designed another, not yet named in the history, to be His apostle to the Gentiles. St Paul was to spread the gospel among the nations more widely than any one of the Twelve, to grapple more firmly and skilfully with the religious and social problems connected with the increase of Gentile Christianity, and to establish more clearly the freedom of the Church from the yoke of Judaism. There was, however, obvious advantage in the employment of St Peter to open the door of faith to the Gentiles. He was known to all the brethren in Jerusalem as a strict Jew in his way of thinking and his adherence to hereditary usage; and if such a

man as he was satisfied of the extension of God's grace to the Gentiles, his word to that effect would go far to abate the prejudice, and win the assent and sympathy of all the Hebrew Christians. We have evidence of this in the chapter following.

At Cæsarea St Peter did not make the occasion for his speech. It was made for him by the Lord Jesus, who was now directing from heaven the activities of His servants in the foundation and extension of the Church. It was the Lord who prepared the centurion Cornelius to hear, and at the same time prepared the apostle to speak with a degree of freedom from Jewish narrowness, and sympathy with the Gentile mind, such as he never felt or displayed till that eventful day.

The audience was quite different from those crowds in Jerusalem which St Peter had previously addressed. Cornelius and his friends were Gentiles by extraction: the centurion himself almost certainly an Italian. A deep furrow separated them in social life from Jews and Galileans; and yet, there was an approximation which tended in some measure to facilitate the apostle's task. The Roman

military stationed at Cæsarea could not be quite unaffected by their surroundings. They were not in a heathen country, but in a community which worshipped one invisible God without help of images, and some of them at all events must have had acquaintance with the Jewish Scriptures. The centurion himself was "a devout man, and one that feared God with all his house, and gave much alms to the people, and prayed to God alway." It was a character which few, if any, of the native Jews can have surpassed.

On the invitation of this good officer, the apostle Peter had come from Joppa with six Jewish brethren. He had taken these brethren with him as helpers and witnesses, for both the character of the invitation which was brought to him, and its coincidence with a remarkable vision which had revealed to him the abolition of those distinctions which had hitherto made it almost impossible for a Jew to have much intercourse with Gentiles, indicated to St Peter that his visit to Cæsarea was to have important bearings on the future of Christianity and the Church.

In his two speeches to the multitude at Jeru-

salem, the apostle began by removing a misconception from the minds of those whom he addressed. In the speech at Cæsarea, he acknowledged the removal of a misconception from his own mind. He had always known that the God of the Jews was by right the God of the Gentiles also—the only true God. He had also known that the Gentiles were to be enlightened and blessed under the Messiah; but he had assumed that in order to this they would have to enter the covenant of circumcision, and be conformed and even subordinated to the chosen race of Israel. But now light had broken in upon his mind through the mid-day vision at Joppa. He now perceived that fleshly distinctions, and separations of race which had long been in force were not to be retained in the kingdom of heaven on earth. The love of God to mankind revealed itself to his mind with a clearness hitherto unknown; so he began his speech with these large-hearted words—"Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons; but in every nation, he that feareth Him, and worketh righteousness, is acceptable to Him." This indeed was an old saying in Israel. It occurs three times in the

Old Testament.* But, though the Apostle probably knew it in the letter, for he was versed in the Scriptures, he had never till now felt the force of this assertion of Divine impartiality, or seen the width of its application. Although he had been so much with Jesus, and had heard Him announce Himself as the light of the world, St Peter had not understood till now that even the best men of other nations were fit persons in God's sight to have the Gospel preached to them as freely as it was preached to the Jews.

So soon, however, as his mind was cleared of the narrow assumptions and prejudices in which he had been reared, the apostle proceeded, with his accustomed energy and succinctness of speech, to make known the word of salvation to the Gentile company gathered before him. The definiteness and decision which marked his address were admirably suited to a military audience. He also showed both tact and fairness in putting his statements on ground which was common to all. At Jerusalem he had spoken to Jews, and therefore rested on the ground of the Old Testament, which they held

* *See* Deut. x. 17; 2 Sam. xiv. 14; 2 Chron. xix. 7.

in reverence, referring to the Law, the Prophets, and the Psalms. But at Cæsarea, though Cornelius himself feared God, and was doubtless acquainted with the Greek version of the Old Testament, the rest of the company may not have been so far enlightened; and in any case, the ancient Scriptures were not to Gentiles what they were to Jews. Therefore St Peter made no quotation from the Old Testament, and advanced no argument to prove that Jesus fulfilled the Law and the Prophets. He took his auditors on ground which they knew, going no further back than the preaching of John the Baptist, and the stir which had arisen about Jesus of Nazareth. All who were present knew something about the baptism which John preached and the works which Jesus did.

Such adaptation on the part of the speaker to the character of his audience ought not to be represented as a sort of crafty device, inconsistent with straightforwardness. It is in harmony with common sense, and must be practised if justice is to be done to religious truth. To missionary preachers, in particular, it is indispensable. A missionary to the Jews must reason from Moses and the prophets, and must

try to prove to them that Jesus was the Christ of whom the prophets wrote, and the end of the law for righteousness to every one who believes. But if he turn to the Gentiles, he must remember that the heathen know nothing of Moses and the prophets, and that questions which mean a great deal for those of the circumcision may mean scarcely anything for those of the uncircumcision. Questions therefore of Old Testament interpretation ought not to be obtruded on the Gentile mind. The woe of the heathen is that they have succumbed to the power of Satan, the ruler of the darkness of this world, and so are under a dominion of injustice and cruelty—their very gods being vile. To them it is not of much consequence to learn how the Gospel is related to "Moses' law." What they need is to hear of One who has come "to destroy the works of the devil," and to transfer men "from darkness into marvellous light"—a Redeemer for all nations, a living Saviour, and a righteous Judge.

This wise principle of adaptation shows itself clearly in the train of thought which St Peter followed at Cæsarea. His speech falls into three parts.

I *A rehearsal of facts of which the audience was*

already cognisant (vv. 36-39).—Though Jesus had never visited that Gentile town, dwellers in Cæsarea could not be unaware of the fame which had gathered round Him in Palestine, and of the shameful death inflicted on Him at Jerusalem. The fact that He had been charged in His life-time with disaffection to the Roman government, had been accused before Pontius Pilate of high treason against Cæsar, and had been crucified as King of the Jews, must have especially attracted the notice of military men responsible for the peace of the country.

St Peter affirmed that this Jesus was no revolutionary agitator, but a preacher of good tidings of peace sent by God to His people, Israel; though, as the apostle happily observed in a parenthesis, He was Lord, not of Israel only, but of all mankind. He did not touch the imperial rights of Cæsar, and yet at the same time He was far above all the Cæsars—He was Lord of all.

The word and authority of Jesus had been attested by good deeds and works of healing; and these again were accounted for on this ground, that God, who had sent Him, was with Him, and anointed Him with the Holy

Ghost and with power. If there was any hesitation to believe this, Simon Peter and his companions were ready with personal testimony —"We are witnesses of all things which He did both in the country of the Jews, and in Jerusalem." The apostle and those who had come with him from Joppa would not object to be strictly interrogated and cross-examined on the facts; and although the speech was not interrupted by any question, we can well suppose that in the time ("certain days," ver. 48) which he spent at Cæsarea, St Peter told many an incident which his own eyes had seen in his Master's career: how He had raised his own mother-in-law from a bed of fever, and Lazarus from the tomb, and opened the eyes of Bartimeus, and walked upon the sea.

Such a prophet, such a healer, the Jews had slain, hanging Him on a tree. The fact was already known to Cornelius and his friends; but the apostle saw fit to lay emphasis on the entire innocence of Jesus. He did so in order to remove any impression which may, very naturally, have lurked in the minds of an Italian officer and his comrades, that One whom the Roman governor had sentenced, and whom

Roman soldiers had scourged and crucified, must have, in some measure, deserved His fate. It was not so. In this case the Roman authorities had taken an unworthy course, and served the cruel malice of the Jews.

II. *The announcement of a new fact, which changed the whole aspect of the case* (vers. 40, 41). —God had raised up Jesus from the dead on the third day.

No allusion to the 16th or 118th Psalm meets us here. Quotations from these sacred odes were for a Jewish, not a Gentile, audience. It would not have greatly moved those Roman soldiers to learn that a Hebrew poet in a remote age had sung of One who, though dead, should not remain in Hades. What they cared for was sufficient proof that in their own time and in the very country in which they were stationed, a crucified man was raised from the dead: and the apostle adduced the proof with an exactness admirably suited to the occasion. He said, not that his Master was seen to rise, but that he was seen after He had risen. He said, not that He was seen by as many as saw Him crucified—for the Christ-rejecting Jews were to see Him no more till He should come in the

clouds of heaven—but that He was seen by witnesses, sufficient in number and unimpeachable in character, whom God had previously chosen to this high privilege.

It may well be asked in what way any historical fact of an unusual nature can be more sufficiently proved. As we have said in a former chapter, if any allege that not even God can raise the dead, we have with such persons no argument here. Bnt grant that the thing is possible with God, and then say what conditions of evidence would satisfy the mind, that the thing had actually happened. All mankind could not be present to see with their own eyes, so that it is a question of sufficient evidence. The following would be reasonable conditions:—

(1.) The witnesses must be more than one or two in number. The evidence of a very small number might be suspected of collusion.

(2.) They must be men of good character, not open to a charge of wilful deceit.

(3.) They must have been well acquainted with the person of Him regarding whom they testified, so that they could not have been mistaken as to His identity.

(4.) They must have had sufficient opportunity or opportunities for the recognition. One or even two occasions would hardly suffice to obviate all doubt.

(5.) They must have told their story at once, and not brought it out when some interval of time had passed, or as an after-thought.

(6.) They must have adhered to their story at all risks, and without any grave incoherence or contradiction among themselves.

Now, all these conditions are met in the evidence for the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

(1.) The witnesses were sufficiently numerous—men and women, apostles and less prominent disciples; one at a time, then two, then eleven, then seven, then "five hundred brethren at once."

(2.) They were of unblemished character. The one deceiver had dropped out of the apostolic band before the crucifixion. The rulers of the Jews despised the rest as unlearned men, but could never make out any charge of deceit. One of them, James the Less, was honoured of all classes in Jerusalem for his high probity, and was known as "the Just."

(3.) They were intimate with Jesus Christ—

had been His close companions, and could not have mistaken any other for Him.

(4.) They had ample opportunity to identify Him; for they not only saw and heard Him, but "did eat and drink with Him after He rose from the dead."

(5.) They told the story from the beginning, and at the greatest possible risk to themselves They laid on it at once the whole weight of the sacred cause which they maintained. Joyfully they accepted the position that, if the resurrection were true, the Church was to succeed; if it was a lie or an illusion, the Church would fail.

(6.) They adhered to this testimony till their last breath; and not one of all these witnesses could ever be induced to retract or even modify the statement that the Lord had risen.

We know that to believe in the resurrection of our Saviour is difficult for those who are reluctant to accept the consequences which flow from it; but we must maintain that, on any fair grounds of estimating the evidence for a long past historical fact, it is a hundred times more rational to believe than to disbelieve it.

III. *A statement of the power and glory of the Risen Jesus* (vers. 42, 43).

1. "This is He who is ordained of God to be Judge of the living and the dead." Jesus Himself had charged His apostles to make this known to the people.

St Peter had touched on this at Jerusalem, when he spoke of the second coming of Jesus, and the "time of restitution of all things." So he put it when addressing Jews, and confining his thoughts to the sphere of Jewish expectation. But now he stated it in the way most suited to impress Gentiles, as did St Paul afterwards at Athens. This Man who had been raised from the dead, and who, though unseen, was now "Lord of all," was ordained to be the Judge of all, both the living and the dead.

There was a special fitness in the first announcement of this to Gentiles being made to a Roman officer, his kinsmen and friends. The great functions of the Romans in the world at that period were those of conquest, government, and judgment. They were the men of the sword, the sceptre, and the judgment-seat. Their master, the Emperor, looked round the world, and was looked up to by the world, as Lord of all. And he, too, was Judge of all, for appeals went up from all regions of the known

world to the supreme throne of judgment at Rome. The Apostle Peter had a startling statement to make to those men of the Italian band,—a quite new doctrine of supremacy, which involved no treason against Cæsar, and yet made the Emperor's glory weak and pale. It was that the one living and true God had ordained a Conqueror, Ruler, and Judge of all, even of Cæsar; and given to Him authority to summon before Him all the dwellers on the earth, and even to call generations of men from their graves to stand before His judgment-seat. The most abject flatterers of the Roman emperors had never ascribed to them such power as this.

2. "Through His name every one that believeth on Him shall receive remission of sins." As in his speeches to the people at Jerusalem, so here again the apostle was careful to proclaim free pardon in Christ, for he knew that it was needed by Gentiles quite as much by Jews. It came in well after the announcement of the Judge. He who will be the Judge is now the Saviour; and, through faith in His name, sinful men are now purged from that which would otherwise involve their future condemnation.

To this truth regarding remission of sins, St Peter said that all the prophets were bearing witness. One is surprised to find that even meritorious commentators have assumed that the reference is to the prophets of the Old Testament, and have cited as a parallel passage St Peter's statement in Solomon's Porch—"All the prophets from Samuel and them that followed after, told of these days." But surely this is quite a mistake. (1.) The statement of the apostle was not that the prophets have told or testified, but that they are bearing witness. He pointed to living witnesses like the apostles themselves. (2.) A quotation from a speech to Jews is no true parallel to an expression used in addressing a Gentile company. In the former case it was an apposite and weighty consideration that the Hebrew prophets after Samuel had foretold these days; but it would have had no such significance for Roman soldiers or their friends at Cæsarea. Now we have seen that St Peter skilfully adapted his argument to his audience. In the present speech he did not need or wish to go further back than to the ministry of John the Baptist. We conclude that in his last sentence he pointed to the pro-

phets of the new age who had begun, in concurrence with the apostles, to utter the good tidings from God regarding Jesus Christ in the power of the Spirit. In his view, the day of Pentecost had ushered in a new era of spiritual communication and prophetic fervour, as foretold in the ancient oracle of Joel. And all the prophets of this new time agreed in this, that there was free remission of sins through faith in the name of the Lord Jesus.

Does any one consider our explanation too hypothetical, and even far-fetched? Does any one object that there has been no mention as yet of any New Testament prophets? Our answer is this. As yet, in this book of Scripture, we have found only the words of Peter, or of Peter and John among the apostles, yet we believe that all the apostles were giving testimony, and the instances of the deacons Stephen and Philip shew that the witness to Christ was by no means confined to the Twelve. And if we have not till now read of prophets as associated with apostles, we soon do so. St Paul has told us that "God set some in the Church, first apostles, secondly prophets;" that "we are built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets;" and that the Lord

Jesus in bestowing gifts, "gave some apostles, and some prophets."* Keeping these statements in mind, we surely give the most natural interpretation when we take St Peter to refer to prophets who, with new ardour in the Holy Ghost, were already testifying to the sin-cancelling power of Jesus. Indeed, we need not go so far as to the Epistles for proof that such prophets existed. The next chapter of this history relates that "in those days there came down prophets from Jerusalem unto Antioch;" and again, "There were at Antioch in the Church prophets and teachers."†

As in music one does well to end on a full clear note, so the apostolic preacher did well to close with this abundant testimony to the blessing of forgiveness through Jesus Christ. Good news to the Gentiles! It was such an assurance as none of their prophets, priests, or philosophers could give. And then this blessing was to be obtained on so simple a plan as this—faith in His name. Of the Jews St Peter had required repentance in order to pardon, because they had rejected the Prince of Life. But to these Gen-

* 1 Cor. xii. 28; Eph. ii. 20; iv. 11.
† Acts xi. 27; xiii. 1.

tiles the Saviour had not "come," or manifested Himself, as to the House of Israel. They had not refused Him as the Jews had done, for He had never been presented or preached to them as One who had a claim on their religious confidence and homage—the Saviour of the world and the Lord of all. Therefore St Peter set the claim of Christ before the Gentiles at Cæsarea, and called on them to believe.

Indeed, he had not time to call on them to believe, for he was gloriously interrupted in his address. It is likely enough that having stated the blessing of pardon that would ensue on faith, the apostle meant to add words of direct exhortation and appeal; but if so, he found it superfluous to do so. Soon as the good tidings of pardon fell from his lips, the audience was suffused with spiritual tenderness—"The Holy Ghost fell on all of them."

What then ensued it will be convenient to consider when we examine the apostle's speech at Jerusalem, narrating the result, and justifying his course of action. Meanwhile we have learned enough to show what power resides in one short, clear sermon on Jesus Christ, when God has prepared both preacher and congrega-

tion, and all things are ready. A hearty straightforward preacher, brethren with him who are in prayerful sympathy, and an audience penetrated by the feeling that they are all assembled "before God"—what may not such a combination secure of spiritual light and joy!

That day at Cæsarea was the Pentecost of the Gentiles. On them, as formerly on Jews, "was poured out the gift of the Holy Ghost." It is inaccurate to pray for another Pentecost in modern times, because the dispensation of the Spirit has begun, and cannot begin again. But it is a constant duty to pray that the Spirit may continue to demonstrate to the hearts of men that word of salvation which is preached in Christendom, and that beyond the bounds of Christendom, where the word is only now beginning to be preached, the Holy Ghost may fall on the people, and God may grant to them also "repentance unto life."

VI.

ST PETER TO JEWISH CHRISTIANS AT JERUSALEM.

"But Peter began, and expounded the matter unto them in order, saying, I was in the city of Joppa praying: and in a trance I saw a vision, a certain vessel descending, as it were a great sheet let down from heaven by four corners; and it came even unto me: upon the which when I had fastened mine eyes, I considered, and saw the fourfooted beasts of the earth and wild beasts and creeping things and fowls of the heaven. And I heard also a voice saying unto me, Rise, Peter; kill and eat. But I said, Not so, Lord: for nothing common or unclean hath ever entered into my mouth. But a voice answered the second time out of heaven, What God hath cleansed, make not thou common. And this was done thrice: and all were drawn up again into heaven. And behold, forthwith three men stood before the house in which we were, having been sent from Cæsarea unto me. And the Spirit bade me go with them, making no distinction. And these six brethren also accompanied me; and we entered into the man's house: and he told us how he had seen the angel standing in his house, and saying, Send to Joppa, and fetch Simon, whose surname is Peter; who shall speak unto thee words, whereby thou shalt be saved, thou and all thy house. And as I began to speak, the Holy Ghost fell on them, even as on us at the beginning. And I remembered the word of the Lord, how that he said, John indeed baptised with water; but ye shall be baptised with the Holy

Ghost. If then God gave unto them the like gift as he did also unto us, when we believed on the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I, that I could withstand God?"—ACTS xi. 4-17.

THIS differs from the previous speeches of the same apostle (except the first), in being addressed to those within the Church, not to those without. It is not an appeal to men to become Christians, but an explanation to men who already were Christians, of a fresh course of action taken in the service of Christ.

While St Peter tarried a few days at Cæsarea at the request of the new Gentile converts, the apostles and brethren in and near Jerusalem heard with surprise of this unexpected victory of the Gospel, and eagerly waited the return of their leader to the capital. He, on his part, was well aware of the necessity for accurately reporting and fully explaining what had occurred to his colleagues and friends at headquarters; and therefore he did not return to Joppa, but went straight up from Cæsarea to Jerusalem. With excellent judgment he took with him the six Jewish Christians from Joppa who had witnessed the glorious scene in the house of Cornelius, and had, under the apostle's direction, baptised the believing Gentiles. These could

corroborate his story, and testify that he had not acted from self-will, but had followed clear indications of the Lord's good pleasure.

Not all the apostles and brethren at Jerusalem, but a certain number of the Christians there, being especially jealous for the honour of Jewish separation from other races of men, were dissatisfied with Simon Peter's course at Cæsarea, and showed it openly. "They that were of the circumcision contended with him." It is very significant of their state of mind that, so far as appears, they made no observation on the preaching of the Gospel to those Gentiles, or even on their having been baptised; but complained of a circumcised man having had social intercourse with the uncircumcised —"Thou wentest in to men uncircumcised, and didst eat with them." Those who took umbrage at this were Christians in this sense, that they acknowledged Jesus as the Christ of Israel; but their thoughts still ran in narrow grooves of Jewish exclusiveness, and they had not caught the great Christian sentiment of love to the world. So they were displeased that an apostle had broken a tradition of strict Judaism, and probably assumed that he had

presumptuously violated the Mosaic law of clean and unclean meats.

Such a condition of mind we probably regard with a little wonder and pity; and yet something very like it is far too common in our modern Christendom. Who has not seen instances of a Christian faith miserably united with small-minded prejudices, and a hot zeal for narrow rules and restrictions? And what can be more trying to the patience of those who, like St Peter, have reached some larger vision of the impartiality and mercy of God? And this also we see everywhere and always. Narrowness of sympathy goes with dulness of perception. Those Jews who were keen for maintaining every sign of separation between themselves and the Gentiles, could not see in what had occurred at Cæsarea anything more important than the question whether Simon Peter did well or ill in sitting at table with the uncircumcised, discovered nothing worthy of their attention or thanksgiving in the belief of the Gospel by the Gentiles, or their having received the Holy Ghost. So it is in the modern Church. The more that men make of external regulation and restriction in our religion, the

more do they incapacitate their minds for perceiving and appreciating what is more spiritual, essential, and permanent.

"But Peter began and expounded the matter to them in order." What he did and said on the occasion suggests to us as follows—

I. *The position taken by even the leading Apostle in the primitive Church.*—The name of Simon Peter has been used for many centuries to cover the exorbitant claim of supremacy over the whole Church advanced by the Bishop of Rome. We, of course, do not admit, even if St Peter had exercised such supremacy, that it would involve the transmission of that supremacy to the Bishops of Rome in lineal succession. But, for the moment, let us waive this serious demurrer, and observe the actual bearing of St Peter in an assembly of Christian brethren. They were not afraid to "contend with him;" and he made no attempt to put the objectors to silence by dint of authority, but patiently explained his course of action till he won a verdict of approval. Is it not plain that there was no such thing as Popedom known to St Peter? There was not even oligarchic government by the

College of Apostles. The Church had leaders and guides—apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers; but the wisdom of Christ, the living Head, was imparted to the whole body, not to a few conspicuous members only, that they might dictate to all the rest. An able writer has remarked on this passage:—"If any man might have carried matters within the Church with a high hand, surely it was this Rock-Man to whom Jesus had given the key; and if ever he had an excuse for being peremptory or self-assertive, it was at the moment when, led by the voice of his Master, he had just set open to the whole heathen world the gates of the kingdom of God. Yet to his brethren, even to brethren whose tone was unpleasant and disputatious, he felt bound to offer a most careful explanation, to fortify his statement by the evidence of witnesses, and to appeal to their own reason in justification of his conduct." *

It is not well that any one whatever in the Church of God should reckon himself above question or challenge from the brethren. It is quite possible that they may find fault through ignorance, knowing only in part when they

* "From Jerusalem to Antioch," by Dr Oswald Dykes, p. 393.

assume that they know all; but, in such a case, the servant of the Lord must learn of St Peter not to give way to any natural feeling of irritation, but calmly explain to such brethren what they have misunderstood. Cases, unhappily, will occur in which fault is found peevishly and even with a touch of malice. So much the worse for the censorious critics; but the servant of the Lord must not strive, or repay bitter words with bitter. Let him tell the unvarnished truth to all who will listen, and leave it to the heavenly Master to vindicate him from unmerited reproach.

II. *The best way to remove misunderstandings among brethren.*—Nine-tenths of the fault-finding among Christians come of defective information. We see that those zealous Jewish Christians who blamed St Peter knew but very partially what his conduct had been, and knew not at all the reasons for his conduct. They heard that he had been living among Gentiles, but appear to have heard nothing of the vision at Joppa, and the intimation of the Lord's will which had been made to the apostle in the Spirit, and nothing of the vision which Cornelius had seen, or of the spiritual results which

had ensued on the preaching of Christ to the company gathered together in the centurion's house. It was rash and unreasonable on their part to ascribe fault to a man in St Peter's responsible position before they had a detailed report; and they certainly laid themselves open to a sharp reproof. But the apostle refrained from rebuke, did not even make complaint. He wished not to excite their prejudice or irritate their national pride any further, but to conciliate their better judgment, and preserve peace in the Church. Therefore he was content to reply to their disputes by a simple straightforward narrative. The facts of the case were strong enough, and needed only to be fully related in order to turn the whole current of opinion and feeling in the apostle's favour, and change the unseemly dispute into unanimous doxology.

This, too, conveys a most valuable lesson to those who, serving Christ in some public capacity, find their course of action called into question. In a large proportion of cases it will be found that fault-finders proceed on most partial and inaccurate information; and, by doing so, they lay themselves open to severe

retort. But the object of a servant of the Lord should be not to triumph over an unreasonable brother, or put him to shame, but to gain victories for the truth, put an end to mischievous misunderstandings, and, so far as possible, maintain peace, brotherly kindness, and charity. Therefore a wise man will not be drawn into contention in the Church, if he can with a good conscience avoid it, will show no thirst for battle, but will meet even provoking fault-finders with candid and dispassionate statements. As they drop their solid facts into the boiling caldron of ill-informed disputation, the noisy bubbling gradually ceases, and excited feelings grow wonderfully cool and calm.

III. *The most effective answer to sticklers on points of order.*—St Peter did not enter into an argument with the dissatisfied brethren upon the permanence of those restrictions which had for so many generations separated the Jews from the Gentiles. He was himself scarcely prepared for such an argument, though a new light on the subject had been cast into his mind by the vision on the house-top at Joppa. No such light, however, had fallen on those brethren at Jerusalem; and it would have been worse

than useless to argue and debate. St Peter took the brethren on ground which no Christian could call in question. Whatever the outward rites and rules connected with religion, they were of less value than the inward and spiritual blessing. Now the fact which he and his six companions from Joppa were there to narrate and attest was this:—that as the word of life was being preached to the Gentile company, the Holy Ghost fell on them, just as on the Jewish multitude on the day of Pentecost. Did not that one momentous fact settle all questions, overcome all misgivings? Since God had bestowed the best blessing from heaven, what was the use of setting up traditional scruples as to the fitness of the persons on whom the blessing had descended; or why should a difficulty be raised about forms and conditions which God in His sovereign pleasure had thus put aside? "If then God gave unto them the like gift as He did also unto us when we believed on the Lord Jesus Christ, who am I, that I could withstand God?"

This way of handling a difficulty seems to us to make short work with many Church controversies about holy orders, correct ritual, and

the like. We admit the presumption in favour of traditional and orderly usages. We would not ourselves willingly belong to any Church that had not, in our judgment, a primitive constitution, an orderly ministry, and a ritual in harmony with the New Testament. But we cannot deny, and do not wish to deny, that Churches which seem to us far less correctly constituted and administered have received the Divine blessing. In ways that we consider exceptional, and through the labours of persons not in holy orders, or whose ordination has but an uncertain validity, and whose right to administer Christian ordinances and preside over Christian fellowship is at least open to serious question, hundreds and thousands have been converted from sin to righteousness, and have lived and died to the Lord. This seems to us to be matter of fact, which only a desperate bigotry can ignore. How is it to be thought of or accounted for? It must be a sore puzzle to those who consider a ministry or priesthood derived from prelates in a line of ordination which they are pleased to call apostolic succession, and the reception of sacraments from such authentic priests, essential to

the communication of Divine grace. But it is no puzzle at all to those who have a larger estimate of the ways of God in saving the children of men. His blessing has never been tied to forms, or the conveyance of it made a perquisite of those who are in a particular line of "orders." To think so is to shut one's eyes to broad historical facts. Surely, when we see that sinners are turned from their evil ways, and that in believing the Word they are made new creatures—a change which can be wrought by no less power than that of the Holy Ghost—our simple duty is to acknowledge the work of God whenever and wherever He pleases to work, and give Him thanks. If, through any instrumentality, and with or without conditions supposed by us to be necessary, God has given to other men the like gift of His favour as to us, who are we that we should withstand God?

IV. *The true place and justification of baptism.*—The Gentiles at Cæsarea having been baptised with the Holy Ghost, it was impossible to deny to them baptism with water.

Indeed there are not two baptisms, but one, having an outer form and inner sense. The former requires water, the latter the grace of

the Holy Spirit. Superstition holds that the former always involves the latter, and therefore urges people to be baptised, or to have their infants baptised, in order that, in or by that rite, they may receive the Holy Ghost, and be made partakers of Christ. This is "Christening" of which the Bible knows nothing. Faith, on the contrary, holds, and primitive usage as indicated in the Acts of the Apostles shows, that partakers of Christ are to be baptised. The proper subjects of the ordinance are baptised, not in order to be thereby made Christians, but because they are Christians, and ought to be openly recognised and marked as such. An old Scottish divine has said:—"As the Israelites were first brought out of Egypt before they were brought through the sea, so we are first redeemed by Christ, and find grace in His eyes before we receive the seals of the covenant of grace. Baptism is intended only for the redeemed." * Another has distinguished between the right to baptism "*in foro Dei*, or before God," and the right "*in foro ecclesiæ*, or in the judgment of the Church." He proceeds to show that the former right belongs to those

* George Gillespie's "Miscellany Questions," chap. xvii.

only "who have actually a saving interest in the Lord Jesus Christ;" and the latter to those only who "appear to have a saving interest in Christ." This last point is proved from the nature of the ordinance. "In baptism there is an open acknowledging of the party for a disciple of Christ. He ought to be looked on as a servant of the great Master before he get on his badge and wear his livery. The commission for baptising runs so, first to make disciples, then to baptise." The writer is, however, careful to protect the baptism of Christian infants, in these words—"Let it be remembered that we acknowledge infants to be disciples of Christ, as well as adult persons; and whatever is, or may be said on this head, must be understood *de subjecto capaci*, and without prejudice to the holy seed, the infants of the faithful." He then confirms his principle by particular references to the New Testament. "All the examples of baptism recorded in the Scripture hold forth none to have been baptised but those that before baptism appeared to have a saving interest in Christ."*

It is enough to trace the dispensation of bap-

* Thomas Boston's "Miscellany Questions," No. 6.

tism through these early chapters of the Acts of the Apostles. At Jerusalem, they that received the word of salvation were baptised. At Samaria, they that believed the good tidings were baptised, both men and women; and the case of Simon the Sorcerer presents no real difficulty, for he professed and appeared to have believed. On the road to Gaza, the Ethiopian treasurer first received Philip's preaching of Jesus, and then was baptised. At Damascus, Saul received his sight through the intervention of Ananias, a disciple of the Lord Jesus, and was filled with the Holy Ghost. Then "he arose, and was baptised." In like manner, at Cæsarea, when the Gentiles believed the word which St Peter preached, and had received the gift of the Holy Ghost, they were baptised. In every case men first became, or appeared to become, Christian disciples, and then they were publicly initiated and acknowledged as such. No one could "forbid water" for their baptism.

Sometimes the Westminster standards of theology are said to teach something very like baptismal regeneration; but the assertion only reveals confusion of ideas in those who make it. The words of the Shorter Catechism are

these—"Baptism is a sacrament wherein the washing with water in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, doth signify and seal our engrafting into Christ, and partaking of the benefits of the covenant of grace, and our engagement to be the Lord's." To convey what is commonly known as the doctrine of baptismal regeneration, the sentence ought to have run thus—"The washing with water doth bring about or effect our ingrafting into Christ." But not so. According to the Catechism, one should have this ingrafting in order to baptism, which rite then signifies or expresses it, and also seals or ratifies it, to the comfort and establishment in faith and hope of him who is so baptised.

This is best seen in the baptism of adults making profession of their own faith; for this, as every one admits, is the normal baptism on which the meaning of that ordinance is most clearly inscribed. But it is on exactly the same principle that we also baptise "the infants of such as are members of the visible Church." It is not to christen or christianise them, but to signify that they are by birth and nurture within, and not without, the pale of the visible Church.

It may be said against this practice that the Christianity of adults is capable of evidence, whereas that of infants is problematical and hypothetic. But this does not amount to much in the argument. An adult is baptised not on his faith, or even on proof of his faith, but on profession of his faith, provided there be nothing in his conduct to render the profession at the time incredible. It may afterwards turn out to be mistaken or insincere, as occurred in the case of Simon at Samaria, adverted to above. But enough that the candidate for baptism professes to have the thing signified. He is then entitled to have the sign. But who will venture to say that the child of a believer, committed in prayer to the Lord, may not have the inward grace, and so the potential discipleship? And why, if capable of the grace, should he be counted incapable of admission to the ordinance which signifies and seals that grace? Why, if even potentially a disciple, may he not be charitably reckoned and treated as such?

But we are wandering from St Peter's speech. It had, like all the other speeches which we have examined, a marked success. Murmurs were

stilled; and the Jewish brethren "glorified God, saying, Then to the Gentiles also hath God granted repentance unto life." Would that the Jewish Christians had all learned and cherished this mood of joyful acquiescence in the conversion of the Gentiles! What contentions and controversies would have been avoided in the early Churches! What trouble might have been spared to the Apostle Paul!

Those disciples at Jerusalem had a clear conception of repentance (1) in its origin as the gift of God's grace; (2) in its issue as "unto life"—a turning from death in sin to life in Jesus Christ. And with this doctrine of repentance ought "the fallow ground" of men's hearts to be broken up in all times and all nations. It is God's command to every man—"repent!" It is God's gift—the disposition and power as well as opportunity to repent. It is God's encouragement—"repent unto life! Turn ye; why will ye die?"

VII.

ST PAUL AT PISIDIAN ANTIOCH IN THE SYNAGOGUE.

"And Paul stood up, and beckoning with the hand said, Men of Israel, and ye that fear God, hearken. The God of this people Israel chose our fathers, and exalted the people when they sojourned in the land of Egypt, and with a high arm led he them forth out of it. And for about the time of forty years suffered he their manners in the wilderness. And when he had destroyed seven nations in the land of Canaan, he gave them their land for an inheritance, for about four hundred and fifty years: and after these things he gave them judges until Samuel the prophet. And afterward they asked for a king: and God gave unto them Saul the son of Kish, a man of the tribe of Benjamin, for the space of forty years. And when he had removed him, he raised up David to be their king; to whom also he bare witness, and said, I have found David the son of Jesse, a man after my heart, who shall do all my will. Of this man's seed hath God according to promise brought unto Israel a Saviour, Jesus; when John had first preached before his coming the baptism of repentance to all the people of Israel. And as John was fulfilling his course, he said, What suppose ye that I am? I am not *he*. But behold, there cometh one after me, the shoes of whose feet I am not worthy to unloose. Brethren, children of the stock of Abraham, and those among you that fear God, to us is the word of this salvation sent forth. For they that dwell in Jerusalem, and their rulers, because they knew him not, nor the voices of the prophets which are read every sabbath, fulfilled them by condemning him. And though they found no

D. Edmond Hiebert Collection

cause of death in him, yet asked they of Pilate that he should be slain. And when they had fulfilled all things that were written f him, they took him down from the tree, and laid him in a omb. But God raised him from the dead: and he was seen for many days of them that came up with him from Galilee to Jerusalem, who are now his witnesses unto the people. And we bring you good tidings of the promise made unto the fathers, how that God hath fulfilled the same unto our children, in that he raised up Jesus; as also it is written in the second psalm, Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee. And as concerning that he raised him up from the dead, now no more to return to corruption, he hath spoken on this wise, I will give you the holy and sure blessings of David. Because he saith also in another psalm, Thou wilt not give thy Holy One to see corruption. For David, after he had in his own generation served the counsel of God, fell on sleep, and was laid unto his fathers, and saw corruption: but he whom God raised up saw no corruption. Be it known unto you therefore, brethren, that through this man is proclaimed unto you remission of sins: and by him every one that believeth is justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses. Beware therefore, lest that come upon you, which is spoken in the prophets; Behold, ye despisers, and wonder, and perish; for I work a work in your days, a work which ye shall in no wise believe, if one declare it unto you."—ACTS xiii. 16–41.

THE scene is changed from Palestine to a hilly region in the interior of Asia Minor, named Pisidia. A large and populous town was there, called Antioch. It is mentioned by both Ptolemy and Strabo, but would have been long ago quite forgotten, and the poor ruins of its ancient structures left in obscurity, had it not been for the visit paid to it by two Christian

missionaries, and the record of that visit by St Luke in the sacred volume.

In all the prosperous towns of Asia Minor at that period Jews had settled; and in Antioch there was a synagogue frequented by the resident Jews and some Proselytes of Gentile extraction. The missionaries of whom we have spoken were Jews; and, therefore, when the Sabbath—our Saturday—came round, they attended the synagogue. Their presence was observed; and, after the usual public reading of the Old Testament, no doubt in the Greek version, the strangers were invited by the rulers of the synagogue to exhort the congregation. So again opportunity came to an apostolic speaker, and was not made or forced by him.

One of the missionaries was Barnabas, whose original name was Joseph—a Levite by extraction, a Cypriote by birth. The other was Saul or Paul, a Benjamite by extraction, a Cilician by birth. It was the latter who spoke in compliance with the invitation given. He rose from his seat, and with a gesture of the hand, which was characteristic of him, summoned the attention of the people.

The task before him was difficult. He had

to win the confidence and hold the attention of an audience to which he was quite unknown. He had to keep the ground of Israel's peculiar history and hope, and yet to show that at the holy city itself the Messiah had been rejected and crucified. But St Paul (for so the Church delights to call him) was the very man for an emergency. Difficulties only developed his resources. He had all the skill and deftness of a well-trained pleader, combined with all the fervour of a man speaking what he intensely believed. Best of all, he had the consummate guidance of the Holy Spirit of God.

A comparison of the speech which he proceeded to deliver with the two addresses of St Peter to the multitude at Jerusalem reveals a considerable similarity. St Paul followed the same Jewish course of thought, appealing to old Hebrew predictions and promises. He also published the same facts regarding Jesus, especially His death, burial, and resurrection, and proclaimed free remission of sins through His name. Yet this is far from being a copy or imitation of those earlier addresses. It has its own characteristic merits; gives evidence of mental breadth and energy in the speaker, and

illustrates his admirable faculty for blending together statement and persuasion.

A closer parallel may be traced between the first reported speech of Paul and that address of Stephen before the Sanhedrim at Jerusalem, which the apostle had heard shortly before his conversion, and could never forget.

Like the martyr, St Paul began with a rapid recital of the history of Israel, probably taking the cue from the Scriptures which had been read in the Synagogue. Thereby he put himself on a good footing with his hearers, and conciliated their strong national feeling. It was not necessary for St Peter, when speaking to the people at Jerusalem, to go so far back as the calling of Israel out of Egypt, their exodus, their error in the wilderness, their settlement in Palestine, their government by judges and kings; but it was well for St Stephen to take such a review when he stood before the council to defend himself from the charge of unfaithfulness to his nation and its hereditary religion; and it was prudent in St Paul to follow the same course in opening his address to Jews and Proselytes far away from the holy city, surrounded by the heathen, and cherishing,

as men so situated were sure to do, an intense and even jealous feeling for the traditions of their ancestry.

St Paul, however, had more than a conciliatory purpose in his sketch of Israel's early history. While desirous to show that he was alive to all the honour and privilege of the chosen people, he also wished to remind his hearers how wilful and refractory that people had often been. After their escape from Egypt they had been detained for forty years in the Wilderness, on account of their murmuring against God, their unbelief, and disobedience. And afterwards, when they had judges, they were not content, but must needs ask for a king. These reminders were thrown out to prepare the audience for the startling charge which the apostle had to bring against the rulers of the Jews at Jerusalem, as having condemned and slain the Saviour whom God had brought to Israel. Let not this be thought incredible. The people had erred before, and might err again. They had rejected Moses and Samuel; and now they had rejected the Christ.

The historical review stopped at the elevation of David to be king. This was certainly not

because instances of national error and disobedience could not be cited from later annals of Israel and Judah, but because the mention of David opened the way for the introduction of the name and story of Jesus. Every Jew, every Proselyte, expected a deliverer of Israel to spring from the root of Jesse; and all those "of the dispersion" must have expected that whenever the long-promised Son of David appeared, he would be hailed with hosannas and followed with enthusiasm by the priests and elders at Jerusalem. St Paul told those at Antioch that the Son of David had come. "Of this man's (David's) seed hath God according to promise brought unto Israel a Saviour, Jesus." One can imagine the rustle of surprise all over the Synagogue. This announcement went far beyond anything that was looked for when the two strangers were invited to speak. It appealed to that hope of a Messiah which had cheered the hearts of religious Jews during years of national depression and subjection to the heathen. Every ear in the Synagogue must have been on the alert to catch every word that followed.

The Jews in Pisidia probably had little in-

tercourse with Palestine, and were vaguely, if at all, informed of the events which had recently transpired in their father-land. Therefore, St Paul thought it well to explain to them that the Son of David had not appeared without the announcement due to His high dignity. A prophet, and more than a prophet, named John, had prepared His way, and by preaching beforehand "the baptism of repentance," had indicated the nature of the salvation which the Son of David was about to bring, and which was expressed under the name, Jesus, as not a political deliverance, but a salvation from sin.

But what followed the appearing of the Saviour? What reception had been given to Him, whose sandals the great prophet, John, deemed himself unworthy to loose? Now was St Paul obliged to tell of the condemnation and crucifixion of Jesus by the dwellers in Jerusalem and their rulers. It was the critical point in his address, and was treated with admirable discretion. Those Jews "of the dispersion" naturally looked to the rulers at the holy city for a pattern of wisdom and for lessons in righteousness. But, alas! it must be shown

to them that those rulers with the people of Jerusalem had erred and sinned more grievously than their fathers. One generation had murmured against Moses, another had rejected the government of God under judges, but this generation had actually rejected and slain the Son of David, the Saviour. It was, on their part, a sin of ignorance, and perverse blindness of heart. They at Jerusalem had not known the meaning of the prophetical books which they read "every Sabbath;" but through this very ignorance they had unwittingly fulfilled prophecy that the Messiah must suffer in order to enter into His glory.

While the people in the Synagogue were listening with amazement to this unexpected statement, St Paul proceeded rapidly to convey to their ears these facts: that the rulers and multitude at Jerusalem, though they could find no fault in Jesus, had demanded and obtained His crucifixion from the Roman governor, Pilate; that the dead body had then been taken "down from the tree," and duly laid "in a tomb;" that God had raised up from the dead Him who had been slain and buried; and that there were

many witnesses, well acquainted with His person in Galilee, who had seen the risen Saviour "for many days."

One can hardly suppose that the Jews and Proselytes in Pisidian Antioch had never heard so much as a rumour of these things till this memorable day. But this was the first clear and firm statement concerning Jesus that had been made in their hearing, and it must have astonished, and even appalled them. Could such things be? Was it to be believed that the foremost men of their nation had been so obtuse and cruel as to quench the nation's dearest hope in innocent blood? What could be more dreadful than that the Messiah Prince should have been slain in the holy city, and that too by the most painful and opprobrious instrument of death—the Cross? And what was to be thought of the alleged resurrection, and the witnesses who asserted it? How did these things agree with the words of ancient prophets?

St Paul gave his hearers no time to express their perplexities. He knew their thoughts, and hastened to meet them. For him, as for all the earliest preachers of our faith, the truth of Christ's resurrection was the point on which

to lay the chief emphasis; and therefore he proceeded to show by quotations from the Old Testament, that Barnabas and he were in harmony with those oracles, and had brought "good tidings of the promise made to their fathers."

The quotations were three :—

1. "Thou art my Son; this day have I begotten Thee," Ps. ii. 7. According to the prophetic ode, the royal dignity and dominion of the Son of David were secured by a divine decree which provided for the raising up of the king as by a birth from the dark womb of death. The ancients had not understood the oracle; but the apostle recognised its fulfilment in the resurrection of Jesus, Son of David, and Son of God. It was a view of the elevation of his Master which he often expressed in his later teachings, as when he wrote of our Saviour as "the first-born from the dead."

2. "I will give you the holy and sure blessings of David," Isa. lv. 3. The great promise to David, regarded by him as "an everlasting covenant," * had respect to the establishment of his throne in the line of his descendants. The

* 2 Sam. xxiii. 5.

throne of David, however, had fallen. How could it be restored and made the throne of an everlasting kingdom? It could not be by any mortal sovereign, however prosperous. But in the Lord Jesus as son of David, yet no more subject to death as David was, for He had risen from the dead, the throne might be established for ever, and so "the sure mercies of David" be fulfilled.

3. "Thou wilt not give Thy Holy One to see corruption," Ps. xvi. 10. On this prophetic word St Peter had spoken at Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost. David had certainly fallen asleep, and his tomb remained undisturbed. The Son of David, the destined keeper of Israel, must be one not liable to death and that corruption which is after death. It was a condition which no one could fulfil in a mortal and corruptible body. David, for this reason, could only serve his own generation. But lo! a Son of David who had endured death, had risen again before the dead form had "seen corruption!" As risen from the dead, Jesus was able to save, and to reign to all generations, and the whole earth is to be filled with His glory.

The facts concerning Jesus having thus been succinctly told, and the harmony of them with Old Testament prophecy set forth, the apostle proceeded with a swiftness which gave no opportunity for interruption, to declare the salvation which Barnabas and he had come forth to preach. Like St Peter at Jerusalem, he announced free remission of sins through the Man of God's right hand, the Saviour. Nay, he went further. He propounded a statement which he carefully reasoned and established in his writings, viz., that justification could not be through obedience to the law of Moses, could be only by the grace of God, and would be to those only who had faith in Jesus Christ. This statement suffices of itself to show that to be justified is something more than to be pardoned. No one could suppose that he could be pardoned through the law. Pardon never is by law: it is an act of grace or mercy. To be justified is to be accounted righteous. The Jews held that they would be justified by and before God on account of careful observance of the law. They think so still. But St Paul had learned, and now began to teach, that such confidence was vain. The perfect law could not

consistently justify—God Himself, as acting in the law, would not justify man whose obedience was imperfect; but God in grace would account as righteous those who believed in Jesus. "It is God that justifieth; who is he that condemneth?"

So clear is this doctrine in St Paul's teaching, that one marvels how the notion of a sinner being justified on account of works of righteousness which he has done, ever obtained any acceptance among Christians. If men will put themselves under the law for justification, the result is and must be the very opposite of that which they seek. It is and must be condemnation, because the law is not perfectly kept, but is violated in thought, word, and deed. Sin is the transgression of the law. God's word of salvation reveals a more excellent way. Justification from all things is by God's free grace to the believers in Jesus; and they are, not are to be, justified. They stand "in Him, in Him alone, gloriously complete."

The Jews became passionately excited when any word was spoken that seemed to derogate from the high dignity of Moses and the law. Accordingly, the uneasiness which had been

gathering during St Paul's address, began at this last word to swell into indignation. The speaker observed it in the faces of his auditors, perhaps in gestures also, and an angry murmur. So he brought his speech to an end with words of warning quoted from the book of Habakkuk (chap. i. 5), the burden of it being that they should not despise the word sent to them from God.

The speech was ended ; and the two missionaries left the synagogue amidst a loud hum of voices eagerly talking of St Paul's discourse. A strong difference of opinion appeared. Some received the word, and followed Paul and Barnabas : but some resisted it, and, hardening their hearts, soon became persecutors of those preachers of salvation.

All prophets and preachers of the Gospel have to warn their hearers against a neglect of the great salvation, or a prejudiced resistance to it. The Master himself had to weep over infatuated Jerusalem. It is enough that servants be as their Lord. They must not count it a strange thing that, however plainly and earnestly they speak, some of their hearers will

lightly esteem the message of reconciliation to God, and return to their houses unjustified. As St Paul said at a later stage of his ministry, "We are a sweet savour of Christ unto God in them that are being saved, and in them that are perishing."

VIII.

ST PETER AND ST JAMES TO THE ASSEMBLY AT JERUSALEM.

"And when there had been much questioning, Peter rose up, and said unto them, Brethren, ye know how that a good while ago God made choice among you, that by my mouth the Gentiles should hear the word of the gospel, and believe. And God, which knoweth the heart, bare them witness, giving them the Holy Ghost, even as he did unto us; and he made no distinction between us and them, cleansing their hearts by faith. Now therefore why tempt ye God, that ye should put a yoke upon the neck of the disciples, which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear? But we believe that we shall be saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, in like manner as they. And all the multitude kept silence; and they hearkened unto Barnabas and Paul rehearsing what signs and wonders God had wrought among the Gentiles by them. And after they had held their peace, James answered, saying, Brethren, hearken unto me: Symeon hath rehearsed how first God did visit the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for his name. And to this agree the words of the prophets; as it is written, After these things I will return, and I will build again the tabernacle of David, which is fallen; and I will build again the ruins thereof, and I will set it up: that the residue of men may seek after the Lord. And all the Gentiles, upon whom my name is called, saith the Lord, who maketh these things known from the beginning of the world. Wherefore my judgment is that we trouble not them which from among the Gentiles turn to God; but that we write unto them, that they abstain from the pollu-

tions of idols, and from fornication, and from what is strangled, and from blood. For Moses from generations of old hath in every city them that preach him, being read in the synagogues every sabbath."—Acts xv. 7–21.

THE apostolic speeches which we have considered hitherto, have been for the most part statements or vindications of the Gospel. Several of the reports given to us by St Luke might be described as "notes of sermons." The only one which prepares us for the discussion that now comes under review, is the address of St Peter at Jerusalem in explanation of his conduct towards Cornelius and other Gentiles at Cæsarea. At the time, that address silenced Jewish murmurers in the mother Church. They did not in express terms acquiesce in the lawfulness of receiving Gentile converts into fellowship without subjecting them to circumcision, and requiring them to pass under the yoke of the Mosaic law; but they acknowledged that God had granted to Gentiles "repentance unto life." The question was not dead, but slept a while. It awoke with energy when the Gospel was openly carried to the Gentiles in Syria and throughout Asia Minor, and churches of mixed origin were formed. About twelve years had passed since St Peter had calmed the

murmurs of the Jewish Christians; and during that time the Church at Jerusalem had been recruited from the Hebrew population only, and contained a good many persons who, though they owned Jesus as the Messiah, had little of His spirit, and were as bigoted as any Pharisees. The mission to the Gentiles had emanated from Antioch, not from Jerusalem; and when the Church in the former city was rejoicing over the success which the missionaries on their return were able to report, it was from Judea that fanatical Jewish Christians came down to disturb the peace and damp the joy at Antioch by insisting that circumcision was essential to salvation. Paul and Barnabas, fresh from the mission field, could not for a moment admit this miserable narrowing of the grace of God. While those Judean Christians could think of nothing greater than the distinctive sanctity and glory of Israel, the missionaries had caught the Master's mighty thought of God's love to the world, and had seen the value and adaptation of the Gospel to men of strange cities, who welcomed it when it was denounced and rejected by the Jews. They knew that it would be impossible, and

felt that it would be useless, to keep the Church on the restricted lines of the synagogue, and to compel converts from all nations to conform to the customs of the Jews. The discussion of the question at Antioch was hot and protracted; so it was determined that a deputation should go to Jerusalem to consult the apostles and elders there, and so ascertain whether the preachers of circumcision who had come from Judea did or did not represent the mature opinions of the mother Church.

Whether the assembly at Jerusalem may be regarded as in any proper sense a synod or council is a question beyond our present scope. Enough that we are allowed to enter the assembly and hear the speeches.

The "apostles and elders" were seated in order, as constituting a Christian Sanhedrim. On the earlier occasion, when St Peter's conduct at Cæsarea had been called in question, we read of "the apostles and the brethren." In the interval, presbyters had been appointed to represent and superintend the general body of Christian brethren. There is no mention of an institution of this order, as there is of the order of deacons, and for this excellent reason, that

the deaconship was a new order, but the eldership was not. The Jews had always been accustomed to the rule of elders, and, as a matter of course, continued that order in the new Christian fellowship. Barnabas and Paul had no hesitation whatever as to the kind of superintendence which was proper for the new congregations gathered through their labours in Asia Minor. They "appointed elders in every church."* It is as plain as possible that those assemblies at Lystra, Iconium, and Pisidian Antioch, were what we should call now-a-days Presbyterian congregations.†

Along with their acknowledged leaders were assembled many of the private Christians of Jerusalem; and in the preliminary "questioning" they probably made their voices heard in exclamations and interruptions, for the matter

* Acts xiv. 21-23.

† It is scarcely necessary to argue this after the acknowledgments of Lightfoot, Jacob, and Hatch, the modern scholarship of our English Prelatism having virtually conceded the Presbyterian position as regards the first, and most important century. The late Dean of Westminster has said, in the last work which issued from his pen—"It is certain that throughout the first century, and for the first years of the second, bishop and presbyter were convertible terms, and that the body of men so-called were the rulers—so far as any permanent rulers existed—of the early Church." Rather awkward this for divines

in hand was one that excited intense feeling, and the mention of silence after St Peter's speech implies that there had been a good deal of noise and agitation before he began. Barnabas and Paul were there with other deputies from Antioch who took the same side in the controversy. The party opposed to them was numerously represented also.

As battles have often begun with the skirmishing of light troops, that could decide nothing, but could search and clear the ground for the onset of the battalions that were to decide the fortune of the day; so in this assembly there was much informal discussion before the leaders spoke. To us it may seem pitiful that the question should have given any trouble; almost ludicrous that such a fleshly rite as circumcision should have been gravely

who have it gravely laid down in their formularies that—"It is evident unto all men diligently reading the Holy Scriptures and ancient authors, that from the apostles' time there have been three orders of ministers—bishops, priests, and deacons." Dean Stanley knew that this was incorrect, and got over it, or slipped past it, thus:—"We commonly speak of three orders, and the present elevation of bishops has justified that phrase; but according to the strict rules of the Church, derived from those early times, there are but two—presbyters and deacons."—"Christian Institutions," pp. 187-189.

regarded as essential to salvation. But it was a dogma taught by venerable Rabbis; and the Jewish Christians who contended for the universal obligation of what they called, with more zeal than accuracy, "the custom of Moses"* (for circumcision came from Abraham), simply overrated the importance of external rites and observances, as narrow-minded men always do. It would not be difficult to show that Gentile Christianity has also had bigots who taught conditions of salvation quite as irrational.

At last it was evident that the "much questioning" was not moving the subject any nearer to solution. We are allowed to hear two speeches which moulded the opinion of the assembly, and brought the somewhat heated and perilous discussion to a temperate and harmonious conclusion. The speakers had great influence, for they were "pillars in the Church." And the Spirit of the Lord gave them meekness of wisdom.

I. "Peter rose up." It had always been his way to take the initiative; and the illustrious part he had played on and since the day of Pentecost entitled him to much honour and

* Acts xv. 1.

deference from the whole Christian community. He was no pope, for, if he had been, he would have settled the matter in dispute by a decree. He claimed nothing more than a voice on a par with the other apostles and elders. He describes himself with his own pen as "an apostle of Jesus Christ, who also am an elder."*

The speech of St Peter, as reported, is short, but clear and to the point. He saw no need for lengthened discussion. He was guided to his conclusion by the logic of facts. The matter now debated was in his view virtually settled by the former case of the Gentiles at Cæsarea, and he at once recalled that case to the mind of the assembly. It was not the bent of this apostle's mind to plough his way through a deep or careful argument; but he knew how to grasp relevant facts, and make them tell strongly on the minds of others. He held that the act of God in cleansing the hearts of Cornelius and his friends by faith, and imparting to them the Holy Ghost, was sufficient to establish the principle that, for a Gentile at all events, circumcision was not essential to salvation! Why should not the decision arrived at,

* 1 Pet. i. 1; v. i.

so many years before, in the case from Cæsarea, apply to other cases as they arose? Why should the objectors "tempt God" by assuming that He would not save Gentiles elsewhere as He had saved them in the house of Cornelius? And for what end did they seek thus to restrict the mercy of God, and limit the range of the Christian Church? Was it then really such an object to impose on the Gentile disciples a yoke of rites and ceremonies which generations of Israel had been unable to bear?

The obligation of circumcision was not the only point raised by the objecting party. Being of the sect of the Pharisees, though now also Christians, they alleged that it was needful not only to circumcise Gentile converts, but also "to charge them to keep the law of Moses."* This was what St Peter called "a yoke upon the neck." He referred to the minute regulations of the ceremonial law which, though familiar to the Jews by hereditary usage, would have been an unmeaning and vexatious burden on Greek or Roman Christians. Nor did he exclude from his meaning the moral precepts of the law of Moses when regarded, as they

* Acts xv. 5.

were by the Pharisees, as instruments for establishing self-righteousness. Indeed the distinction between the ceremonial and the moral elements in the Mosaic legislation which is so carefully made by our theologians, was not at all emphasised by the Jewish mind, which looked on the law as a whole, and was inclined, so far as it made a difference, to give the more important place to ritual, and to make more of customs and ceremonies than of morals.

One thing was quite certain, that salvation for all men was "through the grace of the Lord Jesus;" and no ceremonial or traditional restriction on that grace could be allowed. We can imagine the satisfaction with which St Paul, who understood the question, and appreciated the critical issues of that day better than any one, listened to this clear evangelical statement as it fell from the lips of the venerable Simon Peter. He remembered it, and was obliged to remind St Peter of it on a future occasion at Antioch, when that apostle showed some symptom of the weakness of other days, and acted in a manner inconsistent with his speech.

Happily the speech was on the side of Gentile liberty. St Peter always spoke with effect;

and the whole assembly felt the force of his unanswerable words. The facts which he had recalled could not be denied; and indeed the only question that could now be discussed was whether the principle on which the case of the Cæsarean converts had been decided ought to be applied to all disciples gathered from the heathen nations. "All the multitude kept silence." So far truth and charity had gained the day.

The silence was broken by the missionaries. Perhaps by prearrangement with the leading apostles, perhaps on the happy inspiration of the moment, Barnabas and Paul with excellent tact struck in, and spoke successively in the line which was pointed to by St Peter. Barnabas seems to have spoken first—a judicious arrangement, because he had a stronger hold than his companion on the confidence of the Church at Jerusalem. Both of them were men not likely to surrender any just claim of Judaism without good cause. Barnabas was a Levite, and Paul a carefully educated Pharisee, who even in youth had been a Sanhedrist. They proceeded to rehearse facts which had come

under their own observation during their recent missionary tour in foreign parts, thus following up and deepening the impression of St Peter's speech. They did not so much debate or argue as narrate what God had wrought among the Gentiles under their own ministry. Then they did not need to press the question; it suggested and pressed itself. If God has not refused those Gentile converts on account of their uncircumcision, why should the Church refuse them? And if God gave to them His Holy spirit, why should men hesitate to give them baptism?

Thus the necessary proof was laid before the assembly, that the great question now under discussion was only a continuation and enlargement of that which had been settled twelve years before. And the way was prepared for a reasonable and liberal solution of the difficulty.

II. St James then moved, as we should say, the judgment of the court. There was indeed a third pillar of the Church*—St John—but he, if present, was no doubt content, as at other times, to signify his concurrence with his

* Gal. i. 9.

familiar friend, St Peter. It fell naturally to St James to close the discussion on account of his position as in chief charge of the Church at Jerusalem, or president of the local Presbytery. He is known to have been held in great esteem by all the people of Jerusalem, non-Christian as well as Christian. His character gave great weight to his opinion on such an occasion as this; and his voice must have been eagerly waited for by the Judaising party, because he was a strict Jew, and they must have felt that such a question as they had raised would receive from him all due consideration. He was not implicated in any personal intercourse with Gentiles, as St Peter was, but happily he was too just a man to lay an unnecessary burden on other nations for the exaltation of Judaism, and too enlightened to suppose that all mankind must be forced to adopt a Jewish peculiarity in order to be saved.

This is the only speech of St James which has been preserved. It consists of four sentences:—

1. He recognised the importance and relevancy of the historical case referred to by his colleague, whom he characteristically styled in

the Hebrew form "Symeon." The conversion of Gentiles at Cæsarea appeared to his mind as the act of God in taking a people for His name out of the profane mass of the heathen world.

2. He went to the Old Testament to find prophetic sanction for this new phenomenon. A mind like his craved some ground of Scripture as well as of observation and reason for the admission of the Gentiles to the household of faith. He found it in the book of Amos, from which he made a quotation (chap. ix. 11, 12) in the Septuagint version. The prophet had foretold that the fallen tabernacle of David would be rebuilt, and that in conjunction with this favour to Israel a blessing would fall on the Gentiles—"upon whom My name is called, saith the Lord." The apostle was not careful to fix the definite literal fulfilment of the oracle. He was not unaware of what have been well-described as "the ever widening horizons of prophecy." The erection of the Church of Christ, the Son of David, was a restoration of the tabernacle of David; and there came into prominent view those words which intimated that the Lord's name would be "called" on the Gentiles. Was not this being fulfilled in the

conversion to Christ of a people whom God was now calling out of the heathen world for His name? And, if so, it certainly was not necessary for those Gentile Christians to renounce their own nationalities, and conform to the separate rites and customs of the Jews.

3. In pursuance of this view, he proposed a decision of the case before the assembly, and gave his own vote in its support. He was in favour of some restrictions whereas St Peter had spoken of none, but he conceded the main point about which Paul and Barnabas were anxious. The Gentile converts should not be harassed by exactions and prescriptions which had their origin in Jewish custom and law. Enough that they should conform to certain rules of abstention which could not be called irksome, and which might in some degree conciliate those who were apt to regard all Gentiles alike as unclean. The restrictions were of a prudential nature, intended to preserve the peace between Jewish and Gentile Christians till such time as the lasting principles of New Testament freedom and fellowship should be more clearly understood.

4. In his last sentence he touched with sooth-

ing hand the susceptibilities of the more keen Jewish partisans. The law was according to ancient practice read on every Sabbath in all the synagogues in the world. There was no need to fear that the liberty accorded to the Gentiles would bring the law into disrespect. And there was strong reason why the Gentile Christians should consider and spare the feelings of their Jewish brethren on this subject, and even defer to their scruples in so far as conscience would allow.

At the close of this short speech from St James the deliberation of the council was closed. Some of the Judaising party no doubt were silenced rather than convinced; but the question was settled. The counsel of St James became the unanimous resolution of the whole conclave. The Gentile liberty was secured, and, at the same time, the peace of the whole Church was promoted.

The whole discussion suggests to our minds :—

1. *The advantage of holding Christian assemblies for the adjustment of difficulties.* The narrative which we have been examining is

fatal to the Popish, and to any and every hierarchical, system of church government; for there was open discussion in a grand council of apostles and elders in the presence of their brethren, and the decision went out in the name of Apostles and Presbyters with concurrence of the whole Church. It is also incompatible with a bare system of independency, which leaves every local church to steer its own course, adjust as best it may its own perplexities, and consume its own party spirit or be consumed thereby. We have said that we should deem it beyond our present scope to determine how far this assembly at Jerusalem corresponds to a synod receiving and determining a reference on some local difficulty; but we venture to think that the narrative goes far to sanction and recommend the settlement of such disputes by some large and impartial tribunal.

It is easy to point the finger at synods or councils which have been bigoted, tyrannical, tumultuous, superstitious; but these were not constituted like the assembly at Jerusalem. Give us a council of the elders of the Church, and these, not as a privileged caste meeting apart, but as the trusted leaders of

the Christian community, deliberating in presence of their brethren; and you furnish the best possible instrument for adjusting difficulties, allaying jealousies, maintaining truth and peace. For the safety of the State, local and particular objects must be kept in subordination to the public interest; and this is secured by vesting the supreme control in a National Assembly or High Court of Parliament. To this conclusion all progressive nations tend. They find in this the benefit of bringing out and bringing together the wisdom of their ablest counsellors, and that too under the full light of public comment. A similar arrangement must be good for the Church, conducing as it does alike to that candid consideration and comparison of diverging views which is essential to broad and wise conclusions, and to that development of various gifts among the elders and brethren which is for the profit of all. The Church wants missionary pioneers and energetic workers like Barnabas and Paul; fathers of practical experience, like Saint Peter; grave and cautious men too, like James, who know how to bring disputation to an end by framing a reasonable and equitable deliverance.

2. *The debt of gratitude due to those men who settled what are now to us dead controversies.* The Gnostic, Manichean, Arian, Monophysite, and other questions that tormented and perplexed early Christianity, are nothing now but matters of remote history. Thanks to the defenders of the faith who encountered and refuted these heresies! Thanks above all to the Spirit of Truth who enabled them to discern and maintain sound doctrine!

The question of circumcision which troubled the infancy of the Church so much is now quite dead. We can scarcely conceive a proposal being gravely made or entertained that such a rite should be imposed on Christians of all nations. But we should remember that at the beginning our Gentile liberty in Christ was won only by a hard struggle, and should heartily honour the men, themselves Jews, who broke down the claims of an arrogant Judaism.

Even the decision at Jerusalem did not settle the question. St Paul had still to fight it out in almost every Church, by letters and by oral teaching. Few things are nobler in religious

history than the devotion of this Pharisee—this Hebrew of the Hebrews—to the cause of Gentile liberty in Christ. Thanks to him most of all, and then to other Jewish brethren who championed our freedom from a Jewish yoke! Well for us, and for all the world, that they recognised in Jesus the light to lighten the Gentiles, as well as the glory of the people Israel, and also perceived that "in Him neither circumcision nor uncircumcision profits anything, but a new creation."

IX.

ST PAUL TO THE ATHENIANS.

"And Paul stood in the midst of the Areopagus, and said, Ye men of Athens in all things I perceive that ye are somewhat superstitious. For as I passed along, and observed the objects of your worship, I found also an altar with this inscription, TO AN UNKNOWN GOD. What therefore ye worship in ignorance, this set forth I unto you. The God that made the world and all things therein, he, being Lord of heaven and earth, dwelleth not in temples made with hands; neither is he served by men's hands, as though he needed anything, seeing he himself giveth to all life, and breath, and all things; and he made of one every nation of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth, having determined *their* appointed seasons, and the bounds of their habitation; that they should seek God, if haply they might feel after him, and find him, though he is not far from each one of us; for in him we live, and move, and have our being; as certain even of your own poets have said, For we are also his offspring. Being then the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Godhead is like unto gold, or silver, or stone, graven by art and device of man. The times of ignorance therefore God overlooked; but now he commandeth men that they should all everywhere repent: inasmuch as he hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by the man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead."—Acts xvii. 22-31.

WE are now in Europe, and on the classic soil of Greece. Jews had settled in the chief Greek cities, and gathered round them

a certain number of Proselytes. They had a synagogue at Athens, to which the apostle Paul went on his arrival in the city; but the Jewish influence obviously was small, and the interest of St Paul's visit did not turn on Jewish questions. His discussion in the *Agora*, or market-place, was with the Greeks who loved colloquial argument in the open air; and his address, perhaps the most admired of all his speeches, was delivered to them in their court-house, under the blue sky, on the hill of Mars.

The occasion which drew forth this speech must have galled the sensitive spirit of St Paul, but did not in the least confuse his mind, or embarrass his ready eloquence. He was alone in a city which may be described as thoroughly Pagan, for the few Jews and Proselytes were of no account, and which was at the same time extremely proud of its literary and philosophical eminence, and, therefore, presented a peculiarly hard surface to the Christian missionary. The people whom St Paul met in the market-place, including those who by profession were students of wisdom, treated his grave statements with levity. Now he was accustomed to angry opposition and se-

vere controversy. Such obstruction he was prepared to meet. But this light, chattering Athenian ridicule was a new form of vexation, and one that must have been peculiarly trying to an earnest spirit consciously entrusted with a divine message of transcendent value and urgency.

A fancy seized the Athenians to call this Jewish stranger to a sort of mock trial for his new doctrine. So they seized him, not as with any serious or legal arrest, but rather in a freak of popular humour, and led him up the rough stone steps to the eminence called the Hill of Mars, where the courts were wont to sit in the open air. They placed St Paul on the spot from which accused persons spoke in their own defence; and then taking their places as judges, they said to the apostle: "May we know what this new teaching is which is spoken by thee?" They had no real hunger of soul, no trouble of conscience, no deep religious feeling of any kind; but were actuated by that intellectual curiosity which was one of their strong popular characteristics. If this Jew knew anything which they knew not, let him speak.

By the grace of God, St Paul made admirable use of his opportunity. Speaking to a heathen audience, he founded nothing on Jewish history, quoted nothing from the Hebrew Scriptures. He took the Greeks on grounds which they might be expected to acknowledge, and made citations from their own poets. The address which he uttered on the spur of the moment could not have been more skilfully framed and worded, if he had spent days in preparing it; and this was well, for in no part of the world could he have found an audience so fond of rhetoric and so keen to criticise. It was no ordinary task which the apostle set himself to accomplish, to conciliate and interest an Athenian crowd, while rebuking their national self-complacency and exposing the errors of their philosophers; and then to proclaim on Mars Hill, as he had already in a more colloquial manner announced in the Market-place, Jesus and the Resurrection.

The Authorised Version has, in the opening sentence of the speech, the phrase "too superstitious." The Revised Version gives "somewhat superstitious;" but the American Revisers suggested "very religious." It is difficult to

believe that so skilful a speaker as St Paul opened with an expression fitted to offend. The word he employed is the comparative of an adjective, which means *divinity-fearing*, and was no doubt spoken in a courteous tone and with conciliatory intention. The same term occurs five times in Josephus, and always in a respectful sense. So we understand the apostle as saying—"Athenians! I perceive that you are, more than others, given to honour divinities. Everything around me shows that you pay much homage to your gods." Well might he say so; for Athens was full of temples and sacred statues. An ancient author asserts that there were more statues at Athens than in all the rest of Greece put together.

The altars in the city, and the statues of gods and goddesses were abhorrent to St Paul both as a Jew and as a Christian. They pained his soul as he walked through the streets; but among them he noticed an altar inscribed, not to gods in the plural, not even to one god by name, but "to the unknown God." Ancient writers have been quoted to corroborate the fact that such altars existed in Greece; but it is unnecessary for us to pursue any inquiry into their origin or inten-

tion. What is material is the view which St Paul took of the altar in question, and the advantage to which he turned it in his speech. He adverted to it as a confession of the inadequacy of the Greek Polytheism, notwithstanding all its aids from poetry and sculpture. "Lo," said the Christian preacher, "the God who is God in truth, and whom indeed you know not, Him declare I unto you!"

In all the annals of eloquence, a more felicitous introduction is not to be found. One skilful turn of thought and expression, and the orator was in the heart of his subject, declaring the supremacy and spirituality of God. It was not like speaking to Jews who acknowledged one God, and professed reverence for His prophets. Among the Greeks it was necessary to begin with the doctrine of one God against many; "the God that made the world and all things that are therein." How, too, we find in Paul's public speaking a recollection of that address of Stephen which had so burnt itself into his memory. He followed Stephen also in quoting from Solomon—"The Lord of heaven and earth dwelleth not in temples made with hands."

In his teaching concerning God (ver. 24-29) the apostle spoke as in response to the request that he would explain his doctrine; but in doing so, he struck a series of heavy blows at the views which pervaded his audience. The Epicureans disbelieved in any creation of matter, and the Stoics made God immanent in matter. But St Paul said that the God whom he served "made the world and all things therein." Then the multitude were proud of the temples and their exquisitely chiselled statues both in metal and in marble; and this Jewish preacher, standing there in full view of the colossal Pallas Athene on the summit of the Acropolis, the guardian goddess of the city, spoke of a "Lord of heaven and earth" who would not dwell in the most beautiful temple that man could rear, and could not be represented in "gold or silver or stone, graven by art and man's device." Again, the Epicureans said that the gods were far away, living at ease, and careless of mankind; but Paul said the very opposite—"He is not far from each one of us."

In his teaching regarding man, the apostle also ran counter to his audience. The Greeks, especially those of Attica, were very vain of

their extraction, boasting that they were autochthonous. Other nations were held to be inferior races, and were contemptuously styled barbarians. In direct contradiction of this, St Paul affirmed that God had "made of one every nation of men to dwell on the face of earth." He also taught that all men held the same natural relation to God. All are so constituted that they seek their best interest when they seek Him; and all are so near to Him that "in Him they live, and move, and have their being." In support of this he could not quote Scripture to the heathen, so he cited certain of their own poets who designated man "the offspring of God." The reference was to Aratus of Cilicia, a countryman of Paul, whose verses he had doubtless read at Tarsus; but he said "poets" because the same sentiment is found in a hymn to Zeus, by Cleanthes. But if this was a fact, and no mere poet's dream, what was the worth of all those images? They could not set forth the real nature and all-pervasive power of God. Here is the true argument against the popular use of images and pictures to represent Divine existence. It limits and lowers in the human mind what it attempts to illustrate.

The Greeks confidently assumed their own intellectual illumination. St Paul did not scruple to say that with reference to God they had lived in darkness. The ages during which heathenism had covered Greece, and all the world but little Palestine, had been "times of ignorance." Individual Greeks, indeed, had appeared in those past times who saw and knew far more than the multitude. If Socrates and Plato were not, in the full sense of the term, "children of light," they had bright gleams of lofty thought and wisdom. But a few sparks, or shooting rays of light, could not lift off the burden of darkness from the world; and ignorance of God and of righteousness brooded over the nations, even over that fair city of Athens, brightest home of ancient thought and culture. In His sublime patience, God had endured those long-drawn "times of ignorance;" had not looked on them with an eye of severe scrutiny but glanced quite over them and past them, contemplating the day of Christ, the rising of that True light. The apostle pronounced no opinion on the state of those who had died in the former ignorance; but he boldly announced to his hearers that now was the crisis of the world

now was dawning a new age on Greece and on all countries to which the Gospel came: "Now God commandeth men that they should all everywhere repent."

A command strange to Athenian ears! The people were in their usual lively superficial mood, full of curiosity, ready for discussion, but without any concern about sin, or serious desire of emancipation from its power. And this Jewish stranger, instead of seeking their applause, wanted to smite their consciences, and asserted that there was only one God, and that He commanded Greeks, and all men alike, to repent! What a blow to the Stoics in the crowd! Those champions of strict virtue—were they to be put on a level with other men, and commanded to repent? And what an annoyance to the Epicureans! Those philosophers of pleasure—were they to subject themselves to reproofs of conscience, and to undergo moral pain?

The messengers of God had long reasoned with Israel concerning repentance. The prophets, the Baptist, the Saviour Himself had remonstrated with the chosen nation on their departure or declension from the God of their

fathers, and charged them to repent and return. There is a famous instance in the Old Testament of a heathen king and people repenting toward God, and finding mercy. It is that of the king and people of Nineveh; but we cannot say that the prophet Jonah preached repentance in their streets. He only sounded a warning of doom. They heard and repented. But when Jesus Christ had risen from the dead, He gave a new commandment to His apostles. They were to preach "repentance and remission of sins in His name unto all nations." Hence the statement of St Paul that repentance was now proclaimed to and required of all mankind.

With repentance toward God was always joined in the apostle's mind, faith toward the Lord Jesus Christ. He would no doubt have proceeded to inculcate this, if his speech had not been interrupted. He was leading on to the mention of the Saviour's name when the interruption took place.

And how was he leading on to this? It was of no use to speak to the Athenians of an expected Messiah, or of deliverance from the condemnation incurred under Moses' law, as he might have spoken to Jews and proselytes. He

must put forward some truth for which the heathen mind was in some measure prepared. And he selected the truth of a future judgment of mankind, just as St Peter had done in speaking to Gentiles at Caesarea.* The Greeks believed in three judges before whom disembodied men should stand to receive reward or doom. St Paul told them that God had ordained One Man to "judge the world in righteousness." There was a grave significance in such a statement as made by one whom the Athenians were lightly judging in that court of Areopagus, famous throughout all the provinces and islands of Greece. The quickwitted crowd perceived the bearing of it, and, being vain and shallow-minded, shook it off.

The point at which they interrupted was St Paul's affirmation that the Judge of all was a Man whom God had raised from the dead. He was endeavouring to fix their thoughts on the Man of God's right hand, and to awaken within their breasts some nobler curiosity to learn who and what this "one Man" might be whose name he had not pronounced. But they counted his words to be folly, and so never

* Acts x. 47.

heard even the name of Jesus. Some mocked. Others more polite, but with no more grave intention, said, "We will hear thee concerning this yet again." They could believe in heroes raised to be gods, but not in a man raised from the dead and continuing to be a man. This Jew might speak to them about the nature of God, for that was an accepted topic among the philosophers, and he spoke well, and knew the poets; but once he began to speak of a man's resurrection from the realms of the dead, it seemed to the Athenians a waste of time to listen to him. His statement was beneath the consideration of educated men. They were not angry enough to imprison or kill St Paul, as their fathers killed Socrates by poison near that very spot, for what they called impiety, but really for knowing more divinity than they did themselves. They managed, however, to rid themselves of the apostle's presence as effectually as if they had put him to death. They treated his message with contumely, and would not hear another word, though he had brought his speech to the very point when he was about to preach Jesus, and to tell them of that faith in Him by which

they might become more and better than philosophers — saints. He let them put him to silence. He did not gesticulate and shout against the clamour. He had too great a respect for the Gospel to force it on the people. He had too much reverence for his Master in heaven, to bawl out His name in the ears of those mockers. They had brought him to that spot, and had asked him to speak. If they would not listen, his responsibility was exhausted, his task was done. "Thus Paul went out from among them." We can see him gravely and sadly descending the steps from the hill to the city, which he soon left never to revisit. Often as he sailed along that coast in after years, long as he stayed at the neighbouring city of Corinth, he appears never to have set foot again in Athens, or finished that masterly speech which a frivolous crowd had broken with their mockery.

The mission to Athens seemed to be a failure. Yet not quite. A little flock was gathered even there. One of the judges of the Areopagus showed himself willing to bear the reproach of Christ; also a woman of whom we know nothing but the name, but of whom we are

specially glad to hear, because her case is one of a series in which this missionary tour of St Paul reaped among women good fruits from the women's prayer-meeting at Philippi.* Besides Lydia, we learn that "a certain maid" at Philippi was saved in the name of Jesus Christ, the Pythonic spirit being exorcised. At Thessalonica among the first Christians were "of the chief women not a few." At Berœa also there were "of the Greek women of honourable estate not a few." And now, at Athens, "a woman named Damaris." Others joined Dionysius and Damaris, and a little Church was formed which continued and flourished at Athens for centuries. So the apparent defeat of St Paul turned out an ultimate victory. The Athenian gods were weak before the Man whom Paul preached, whom God had raised from the dead.

How little after all did that heathen Athens know! With all its brilliant succession of philosophers, orators, statesmen, soldiers, artists, and poets, what darkness brooded over the city as compared with the celestial light which that one man, Paul of Tarsus, carried in his breast!

* Acts xvi. 13-18; xvii. 4, 12, 34.

What an element in civilisation and genuine culture is wanting when religious knowledge and conviction are left out or are degraded and misled by superstition! One may see it in our modern Christendom. Superstition has for many generations lain as an incubus on certain Christian nations. And now an Agnostic and Christ-ignoring education is coming into vogue, which laughs not at superstition only, but at all revealed religion. Many seem to hail it in the interest of liberty, knowledge, and social progress. We believe that it is the way to darkness and social chaos. They are the wise who have the fear of the Lord: and they are the freemen, whom the truth makes free.

The Athenians were willing to make room for new divinities, but with an easy tolerance which betrayed their lack of reverential faith in any god. A similar spirit is abroad at the present day, even in our own cities. Men are so kind as to say that they do not wish to interfere with existing creeds and ancient institutions. Let them remain for what they are worth. Let every one keep the tradition or belief that suits him. If he be under a delusion why disturb him, or deprive him of what he finds to be help-

ful? At the same time, if any one has any more light to communicate, by all means let his light shine. There is room for him too, and for his doctrine. We have grown very broad in our views, very tolerant all round. We allow something to be said for this, and something for that; and then we find an element of much value in a third view which appears to contradict both the others. But is not faith in the absolute truth of any doctrine whatever concerning God and Jesus Christ slipping away under these plausible phrases? Are not men often easy and tolerant because they have no strong conviction or deep feeling of things unseen? You may detect them by a simple experiment. Bring your holy doctrine to the reproof of their vainglory, and see how soon they chafe and mock. Deal with their consciences, and preach to them Christ and His future judgment of them and all men in righteousness, and see how soon they grow impatient and shut their ears.

Wisdom is neither with the mocking crowd nor with the supercilious philosophers. Dionysius and Damaris showed a more excellent way. The gospel which others slighted they embraced.

The command to repent which others scouted they obeyed. The warning of judgment which others cast from them they laid to heart. The Man of God's right hand, the risen Lord, whom all around them rejected, they adhered to and honoured as the mighty Saviour not of the Jews only, but also of the Greeks.

X.

ST PAUL TO PRESBYTERS AT MILETUS.

"And when they were come to him, he said unto them, Ye yourselves know, from the first day that I set foot in Asia, after what manner I was with you all the time, serving the Lord with all lowliness of mind, and with tears, and with trials which befell me by the plots of the Jews: how that I shrank not from declaring unto you anything that was profitable, and teaching you publicly and from house to house, testifying both to Jews and to Greeks repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ. And now, behold, I go bound in the spirit unto Jerusalem, not knowing the things that shall befall me there: save that the Holy Ghost testifieth unto me in every city, saying that bonds and afflictions abide me. But I hold not my life of any account, as dear unto myself, so that I may accomplish my course, and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God. And now behold, I know that ye all, among whom I went about preaching the kingdom, shall see my face no more. Wherefore I testify unto you this day, that I am pure from the blood of all men. For I shrank not from declaring unto you the whole counsel of God. Take heed unto yourselves, and to all the flock, in the which the Holy Ghost hath made you bishops, to feed the church of God, which he purchased with his own blood. I know that after my departing grievous wolves shall enter in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them. Wherefore watch ye, remembering that by the space of three years I ceased not to admonish every

one night and day with tears. And now I commend you to God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you the inheritance among all them that are sanctified. I coveted no man's silver, or gold, or apparel. Ye yourselves know that these hands ministered unto my necessities, and to them that were with me. In all things I gave you an example, how that so labouring ye ought to help the weak, and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he himself said, It is more blessed to give than to receive."—Acts xx. 18-35.

THIS is not a speech to the people, but a charge to officers of the Church. We may characterise it as the first specimen of the kind. It is true that our Lord gave solemn charge and admonition both to the Seventy and to the Twelve; but this is the first instance of such an address delivered by a servant of Christ to fellow-servants in the Church. If any one had a good right to admonish his brethren it certainly was St Paul, both on account of his now well-established apostolic dignity, and because of his devoted labours in the gospel of Christ. In no place had these labours been more abundant than in the region of Asia Minor, and especially in the city and neighbourhood of Ephesus. Accordingly, as he sailed along that coast on his way to Jerusalem, not having time for a visit to that city, yet not willing to lose the opportunity of some inter-

course with the Ephesian Church, he asked the elders or bishops of that Church to meet him at the seaport town of Miletus. It is impossible to say how many were in the local Presbytery—perhaps a score. They at once went down by road to Miletus, and had an interview with the apostle, which is fresh in the thoughts of men to this day, long after both Ephesus and Miletus have fallen to ruins.

This speech, as reported, is full of St Paul's finest traits — his sensitiveness, tenderness, faithfulness, and firmness.

I. He appealed to the elders in regard to their knowledge of his Christian life and ministry. He did so with a frankness as far removed from foolish pride as from strained humility. And he did it for three reasons :— (1) To lay it on the consciences of those elders, that they should not permit his name and authority to be disparaged in his absence; (2) to give moral force to the exhortations which he meant to address to them ; (3) to set before them an example which they ought to follow. In those days there were no books on the Christian life or pastoral care in circulation. Paul himself had to be a book and a model to

those Ephesian brethren. Let them be imitators of him, as he also was of Christ.

The references to personal labour and suffering are strewn all over the speech. It is instructive to observe that the apostle first appealed to the knowledge which the elders had of his life, and then reminded them of his doctrine. His manner of life showed the value he put upon the doctrine, and the powerful influence which it was fitted to exert over those who heartily believed and confessed it. Teaching, however clear, if unsupported by the life of the teacher, carries but a faint and doubtful impression to the hearts of those who see and hear him.

It gave St Paul an immense power in addressing the elders from Ephesus that he could thus fearlessly recall to their remembrance his devotion to the Lord, whom he had served among them with a lowly mind and in the face of trial and danger, and his assiduity in the Church while teaching both publicly and from house to house. He had admonished all who would listen to him at Ephesus with a fidelity that cleared him of blame for the death of any sinner impenitent, with a thoroughness which

kept back no part of the Divine counsel that was within his cognisance, and at the same time with a tenderness of feeling which had often poured tears from his eyes.

Tears are mentioned three times in this interview at Miletus. No one who understands the character of St Paul will infer that he was of a weak or effeminate nature. On the contrary, he was signalised by masculine energy and splendid courage; but it was quite consistent with this, and a mark of the true greatness of the man, that he had a quick and deep sensibility passing the tenderness of women. So at Miletus (1) he spoke of the tears which had been pressed from his eyes by the trials encountered in his ministry, and especially by the deadly hatred shown to him by his own nation—"the plots of the Jews;" (2) he recalled his tears of pastoral anxiety at Ephesus, when he was earnestly watching for souls; (3) the elders wept sore when they learned that the apostle was now leaving them, with no hope or intention to return. We do not read that he wept; but we feel very sure that his eyes were not dry as he turned from those weeping friends, stepped on board the ship, and sailed away.

Another point on which the apostle laid some stress was his disinterestedness in the Lord's service. From more than one of his epistles we perceive that he was keenly sensitive to any imputation of self-seeking motives; and he knew that he was exposed to insinuations of this sort from hostile and envious tongues in all the cities which he had visited. It was then as it is now. Those who love money and live for it are always ready to believe that others love money, and to allege that every one is mercenary. They are particularly fond of insinuating that those who teach and spread religion do so merely to get a living thereby.

To silence such calumnies the apostle had worked with his hands at Ephesus for his own support and that of his companions. It is scarcely necessary for ministers of the word in our modern cities to take such steps for the vindication of their motives. Intelligent congregations know that they would be the losers and sufferers if their pastors were to occupy themselves day after day with manual work or worldly business for the support of their families and themselves. Every minister of the Word is not a Paul; and if pastors were

not relieved from toil for their own support, the flocks would be ill-guarded and ill-fed. It cannot be too strongly put or too clearly understood, that ministerial support in the form of stipend or "living" is provided in the interest of the Church, *i.e.* of the Christian assembly, and not of the ministry as a privileged caste. Better for preachers and teachers of religion to renounce ministry for ever than to pursue it for "silver or gold, or apparel." But if they are pursuing ministry with higher motives, better for the Church, at least in educated communities, to provide them with such things temporal as they have need of, in order that they may more effectively watch over and nourish the flock of God.

We must also freely admit that cases may still occur in which it would be incumbent on a missionary to follow this apostle's example. If he were labouring among very poor people, he might best win their affection by sharing their lot; or, if he were trying to introduce the gospel among a population suspicious of his motives, and therefore prejudiced against his testimony, he might do well to meet his personal necessities by the labour of his own hands, that the gospel might not be hindered.

When St Paul had thus appealed to the elders in regard to the spirit and manner of his ministry at Ephesus, he also reminded them of the great theme on which he had dwelt both in public and in private. It was the same gospel which he had everywhere delivered, alike to Jews and Gentiles; and it comprised "repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ." Not a word did the apostle say of the "special miracles" which God had wrought by him at Ephesus,* for such signs and wonders were exceptional in their character, and not permanent accompaniments of the gospel; but he was emphatic on these two indispensable things—repentance and faith—for these brought salvation home, and these were themes to be handled by the elders, and all others at Ephesus, who should thereafter proclaim and teach the gospel of grace.

This was the very expression of St Paul—"to testify the gospel of the grace of God." He also spoke of preaching "the kingdom;" and of declaring "the whole counsel of God." Such had been his ministry at all costs and

* Acts xix. 11, 12.

risks ; and his ardent desire was that the elders should continue the faithful testimony, and preach the same and no other gospel to both Jews and Greeks.

II. Having reminded the elders of his past labours, St Paul proceeded to explain to them the reason of this interview and address. He was on his way to Jerusalem, and knew that his visit to that city would be at the peril of his life.

At this point we are much struck with the apostle's conformity to the sufferings of his Lord. "It came to pass, when the days were well nigh come that He should be received up, He steadfastly set His face to go to Jerusalem."* The Master took no counsel with flesh and blood, did not consult even His most intimate friends among the disciples, but simply assured them "that He must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and the third day be raised up."† His apostles were most unwilling that He should cast Himself into such danger. One of them went so far as to say—"Be it far from Thee, Lord! This

* Luke ix. 51. † Matt. xvi. 21.

shall not be unto Thee." But Jesus replied by a prompt rebuke. Nothing could shake His purpose. So he calmly pursued His way, the disciples attending Him with misgiving and fear. "Jesus was going before them, and they were amazed; and they that followed were afraid."*

So also Christ's servant, Paul, steadfastly set his face to go to Jerusalem, knowing that he should suffer many things. And he too was attended by disciples, but took no counsel from them, or from any other mortal men. A solemn impression of duty was on his conscience. He went "bound in the spirit;" and only told to his companions his settled purpose. Many tried to dissuade him. At Tyre and at Cæsarea very earnest efforts were put forth to arrest his perilous progress, but in vain. He knew not what things should befal him at Jerusalem, as his Master had known; but he had sufficient presentiment and warning of great danger awaiting him in the Jewish capital to make his obedience to the heavenly indication of duty truly Christlike and heroic.

Such intrepid persistence as this was made

* Mark x. 32.

possible to St Paul simply through his intense devotion to Christ and the gospel, a devotion which was produced and maintained within him by the operation of the Holy Ghost. It was no longer any object with him to live till old age, unless his life could be of service to the Master, and the Master's cause. All that he wished for was to accomplish his course, to fulfil that ministry which he had received, not from man, but from the Lord Jesus. He never could fulfil that ministry if he did not obey the guidance of the Holy Spirit, however trying that obedience might be to the flesh; and he never could mar that ministry or end it prematurely if he followed, even through "bonds and afflictions," the command which the Lord by the Spirit had bound upon his soul.

III. With these touching references to his own past and future, St Paul joined exhortation and warning to the Presbyter-Bishops of Ephesus. He minded them that the same Holy Ghost whose guidance he felt bound to obey implicitly, had the direction of their duty also. The Holy Ghost had made them overseers or bishops of the Christian flock.

Such was the high estimate of spiritual

office in the primitive Church. It did not allow those bishops to lord it over God's heritage, but it required them to bear themselves as the organs of a heavenly power, channels of Divine direction, and superintendents of a spiritual province. For men in such a position to assume secular office and authority, would be to descend from their true dignity. For men in such a position to allow secular power to control the worship and government of the Church, would be to betray their solemn spiritual trust.

"Take heed to yourselves!" O wise and faithful word! Oversight of one's self is certainly the first requirement for a judicious oversight of others. It is a charge to be constantly pressed on the consciences of those who are shepherds and bishops of souls, and that for various reasons—(1.) Their acknowledged religious position tempts them to take their spiritual life and health for granted, and to relax that devout vigilance over themselves which other Christians find so indispensable. (2.) While they neglect introspection, and yet perform their public functions in the Church with all regularity, they tend to become mere religious *hacks*,

and grow more and more unfit to be the real channels of spiritual guidance to others. (3.) Because of their position, any coldness of heart, or inconsistency of life, on their part, does double injury to the cause of Christ.

In modern times, this counsel needs to be given also to the many amateur directors of religious effort who have sprung up on every side—a sort of self-appointed bishops—and also to the countless critics who are ready, at the shortest notice, to pass an opinion—generally an unfavourable one—on the religion of their neighbours. Most of these persons pronounce far too freely on the spiritual condition of individuals and of churches. It were better that they should take heed to themselves, and reserve their strict censures for their own faults.

The next direction to the Ephesian Presbyters was—"Take heed to all the flock in which the Holy Ghost hath made you bishops, to feed the Church of God, which He purchased with His own blood." The Church was not the flock of those bishops. It was forbidden to bishops to "draw away disciples *after them*;" and it would be well for modern Christian shepherds to avoid such expressions as—"My church," "my flock,"

"my congregation." The redeemed people of God in any definite place as a city, town, or parish, form the flock, the one flock, of God. They may gather in portions here or there for worship and communion, and may vary somewhat in their forms and customs; but before God, they are still one flock. The duty of the bishops in each place (for not even the smallest Church should be put under one bishop) is to watch over and feed the people of God's pasture, and sheep of His hand, dividing the work among them according to their ability. To "feed the flock" is indeed a comprehensive expression, including instruction, guidance, comfort, and discipline.

As the shedding of tears is mentioned three times in the interview, so also we read three times of the shedding of blood, or laying down of the life, the physical basis of which is the blood. (1.) His own life the apostle was willing to yield up at Jerusalem if it was required for the service of Christ and the Church. (2.) From the blood of all men he kept himself pure by so preaching the Gospel, that if any heard and refused it, their blood would be on their own heads, and would not be required at the faithful

watchman's hand. (3.) The blood of the Lord Jesus Christ by which the flock or Church of God has been purchased, St Paul thought of with reverent joy and thankfulness, and referred to it in order to remind the Elders how dear the Church was to God, and therefore how deserving of their earnest pastoral care.

The apostle counselled the elders on whom all this sacred responsibility rested to follow his own example as to self-support. At Ephesus, where it had been so common to practise and display pseudo-spiritual arts for filthy lucre's sake, * it was eminently advisable that the chiefs of the Christian community should prove themselves thoroughly disinterested in their pious labours. It was well too that instead of being eager to receive, they should show an example to others in Christian giving, and should tax their own strength in order to help the weak.

He also dropped a word of warning which must have added an element of alarm to the sorrow of the assembled bishops. He foresaw that after his departure some of those teachers of error who in so many places tried to subvert his teaching and influence, would appear at

* Acts xix. 13, 19.

Ephesus, and have some measure of success. Nay, more; even in the ranks of the elders some would be found to play the part of bad bishops, wolves instead of shepherds, living on the flock and serving themselves of the silly sheep, instead of living for the flock and feeding it in the counsel and love of God. He did not expatiate on the subject, but sounded the alarm —"Watch!" So the Saviour, before he suffered at Jerusalem, indicated to the disciples that they were "not all clean." He indeed saw the future more clearly than His servant, Paul. He had more than a general foreboding of treason; He knew "who it was that should betray Him."

From the message of the Lord to the Ephesian Church delivered through St John at the end of the first century, we learn that the evil here spoken of did arise.* We also gather that the warning of St Paul had not been without good effect, followed up as it must have been by the exhortations of St John during his long stay at Ephesus; for those who called themselves apostles, but were not, were tried and found false, and the Church as represented by its angel, was praised for having rejected those "evil men."

* Rev. ii. 1-7.

IV. As he departed, St Paul commended these brethren to God and to the word of His grace. With this benediction (ver. 32) he probably meant to conclude; but having mentioned God's munificent gift of an inheritance, he was moved to add an exhortation on the blessedness of giving.

In the foresight of dangers coming on those elders as well as on himself, St Paul prayerfully entrusted them to God who guards the life and keeps the feet of His saints. And with God he joined the Gospel, as "the word of His grace."* By God and the Gospel the Church at Ephesus would be built up. The false and perverse teachers would try to pull it down. How forcibly must the language about the building the inheritance have been recalled to the minds of the elders, when, in course of a few years, they received and read St Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians, in which he dwelt so impressively both on the building together of Christians into a holy temple, and on the inheritance which

* Stier, in "Words of the Apostles," thinks it is "the Independent Word in the preached word." But the application of the title Logos to Christ is peculiar to St John, and not found in the pages of St Paul.

God has in the saints, and the saints have in God!*

How again we are reminded of the action of the Saviour in commending His followers to the Divine protection before he suffered. "Holy Father, keep them in Thy name! . . . I pray not that Thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that Thou shouldest keep them from the evil."†

At the end of other apostolic speeches, we have looked for the result in the conversion of some of the hearers, the conciliation of some who had been hostile, or the persuasion of some who had doubted. In this case we see the tribute to the fitness and power with which St Paul had spoken in the solemn feeling that fell on the listening Elders and the tears that flowed from their eyes. Then the apostle on bended knees prayed with them all: after which they parted with every sign of sorrowful affection. Paul loved strongly, and was strongly loved.

The servant is as his Master: but the Master is above the servant still. Jesus Christ left His disciples, yet did not leave them comfortless.

* Eph. i. 2. † John xvii. 11-15.

Indeed, in the presence of the Holy Ghost, He is with us always. We do not see His face, but we feel His power, and taste His loving-kindness. Nor may we say that we shall see His face no more. We look for Him; and in this we rejoice most of all that we shall see His face, and His name will be on our foreheads. O bright, long-looked-for day, when those also whose faces we have lost on earth with tears will re-appear, and with them, Paul and all the rest who have loved the Lord's appearing, wearing their crowns of righteousness! We have sorrow when faces that we love fade away in death, like the face of Paul as the ship bore him away from the company upon the shore; but we sorrow not as others who have no hope. "Those who sleep in Jesus will God bring with Him."

XI.

ST PAUL TO A MOB AT JERUSALEM.

"Brethren and fathers, hear ye the defence which I now make unto you. And when they heard that he spake unto them in the Hebrew language, they were the more quiet: and he saith, I am a Jew, born in Tarsus of Cilicia, but brought up in this city, at the feet of Gamaliel, instructed according to the strict manner of the law of our fathers, being zealous for God, even as ye all are this day: and I persecuted this Way unto the death, binding and delivering into prisons both men and women. As also the high priest doth bear me witness, and all the estate of the elders: from whom also I received letters unto the brethren, and journeyed to Damascus, to bring them also which were there unto Jerusalem in bonds, for to be punished. And it came to pass, that, as I made my journey, and drew nigh unto Damascus, about noon, suddenly there shone from heaven a great light round about me. And I fell unto the ground, and heard a voice saying unto me, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? And I answered, Who art thou, Lord? And he said unto me, I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom thou persecutest. And they that were with me beheld indeed the light, but they heard not the voice of him that spake to me. And I said, What shall I do, Lord? And the Lord said unto me, Arise, and go into Damascus; and there it shall be told thee of all things which are appointed for thee to do. And when I could not see for the glory of that light, being led by the hand of them that were with me, I came into Damascus. And one Ananias, a devout man according to the law, well reported of by all the Jews that dwelt there, came unto me, and standing by me said unto me, Brother Saul, re-

ceive thy sight. And in that very hour I looked up on him. And he said, The God of our fathers hath appointed thee to know his will, and to see the Righteous One, and to hear a voice from his mouth. For thou shalt be a witness for him unto all men of what thou hast seen and heard. And now why tarriest thou? arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on his name. And it came to pass, that, when I had returned to Jerusalem, and while I prayed in the temple, I fell into a trance, and saw him saying unto me, Make haste, and get thee quickly out of Jerusalem: because they will not receive of thee testimony concerning me. And I said, Lord, they themselves know that I imprisoned and beat in every synagogue them that believed on thee; and when the blood of Stephen thy witness was shed, I also was standing by, and consenting, and keeping the garments of them that slew him. And he said unto me, Depart: for I will send thee forth far hence unto the Gentiles." —Acts xxii. 1-21.

THIS is a speech to an excited crowd, made by one who had but just escaped from their clutches. St Paul stood on the stairs which led from the court of the Temple to the tower of Antonia, protected by a guard of Roman soldiers from a surging multitude of Jews who filled the court below, and pierced the air with angry outcries for his life. The apostle calmly surveyed them, and having obtained permission from the Roman officers, stretched forth his hand—his usual oratorical gesture—and began to speak. A sudden silence fell on the crowd, and, probably for the first,

certainly for the last time, the voice of this great Witness for Christ rang through the courts of the national sanctuary.

We are struck with—

1. The love to his nation which this action of St Paul evinced. He does not seem to have become in the least embittered against the Jews by all that he had suffered from their cruel enmity in Asia Minor, in Macedonia, and in Greece. Nay, though he had but narrowly escaped sudden and violent death at the hands of this mob in Jerusalem, and saw nothing but fanatical prejudice and unreasoning hatred blazing from their eyes and leaping from their throats, he would not turn away from them into the tower occupied by the heathen garrison without one intrepid and earnest effort to persuade his own nation of the claims of Jesus as the Lord Christ, and to abate their frantic opposition to the Gospel. Even in that moment of sharp emergency, and that scene of angry tumult, he was little concerned about his own life, but much concerned about Israel's blindness, and anxious to fulfil among Jews as well as Gentiles the ministry which he had received from the Lord Jesus.

2. The wonderful composure and skill with which the apostle spoke. How evident that the Spirit of wisdom and power was with him!

It was well judged to turn from the Greek language which he commonly spoke, and in which he had addressed the Roman officer, to the Hebraic, *i.e.*, not pure Hebrew, but the Syriac dialect which was the vernacular speech of Palestine at the period. This seemed to imply that he was one of themselves, and so was listened to, when a speech in Greek would probably have irritated the crowd.

Then, the opening words, "I am a Jew," were well chosen to conciliate; as were the references to the high priest and the elders, and the description of Ananias as "a devout man according to the law, well reported of by all the Jews" at Damascus. Such language had begun to soothe the excited feeling of the crowd, when, the speaker having occasion to mention the Gentiles, the storm broke out again. One has but to mark the howl of rage that suddenly broke from the mob, to appreciate the skill with which St Paul chose his line of defence, and picked his words, to be allowed to speak so long as he did.

Looking at the speech as a whole, we perceive it to be a personal vindication such as the occasion demanded, but so expressed as to be at the same time a courageous testimony to the Messiahship and Lordship of Jesus of Nazareth whom the authorities and people of Jerusalem had rejected and slain. The apostle did not protest against that foolish frenzy of the crowd to which he had so nearly fallen a victim. On the contrary, he gave his audience to understand that he could easily account for their excitement and make allowance for it; for not only was he himself a Jew, but at one time he had been as furious against Christians as any of them could be. This the high priest and the elders could certify. Indeed, so hostile had he been to the followers of the Nazarene, and so persuaded that in persecuting them he was loyal to Israel and zealous for God, that nothing short of a revelation from heaven could have made him change his feeling and reverse his conduct. The fanatical mob before him showed to the apostle a dreadful picture of the cruel rage which once had possessed his own breast before the Lord called and enlightened him; and the sight of it brought, if not a

tremulous tone to his voice, a keen sense of shame and pity to his heart.

He told them where he was born, how and where he was educated, and with what conscientious severity he had once persecuted Christians. More than twenty years had passed and left many traces of toil and hardship on his frame. The crowd, therefore, could not recognise him ; though the chief priests and elders, if they had been so disposed, could have identified him with that young Pharisee who, at and after the death of Stephen, excelled all others in his hot zeal to suppress the sect of the Nazarenes. How came it to pass that he was now zealous for that "Way" which he was then so zealous against? Why did he now build up what he then sought to destroy? The answer was that revelations from heaven which he could not dispute or resist had shown him his error, and brought him to the faith and service of the Lord Jesus. He spoke of two visions—

I. *The revelation of the Lord from heaven on St Paul's Journey to Damascus.*—This was the turning-point in his career. No doubt the story was generally known to Christians at Jerusalem, and everywhere else. All that concerned the

signal conversion of so bitter a persecutor into so fervent a leader of the Christian host must have had a commanding interest for their minds, and been a frequent theme of conversation and thanksgiving. But now for the first time the people of Jerusalem heard it from his own lips. They were not worthy to hear it; but it is a story which the Church will never cease to hold dear, and which converted Israel will yet learn to read with adoring wonder—how the young persecutor was on his way with an escort to Damascus, resolved to extirpate the Nazarene heresy from the Jewish settlement in that ancient city, and how there suddenly shone upon him a light from heaven, bright indeed, for it exceeded the blaze of the Syrian noon. So much his companions saw, and they also heard a sound. But Saul only, prostrate on the ground, heard the words that were spoken, and which at once sunk deeply into his soul—"Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou Me? And I answered, Who art Thou, Lord? And He said unto me, I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom thou persecutest."

This Prophet of Nazareth then really was the Messiah! This Jesus against whom he was so

prejudiced, and whose followers he was hunting down as though they were unfit to live, was the Lord! Stephen was right, and had died for the truth, a martyr and a saint! And he himself was wrong, blind, wicked, amidst all his pharisaic learning, miserably ignorant of the Christ of God!

Yet, even in that awful moment of overpowering wonder and intense self-reproach, Saul of Tarsus so far kept his characteristic presence of mind as to ask the Lord what he should do. Receiving answer that he should proceed to Damascus, and there receive further guidance, he went on with that decision and promptitude which also characterised him, and entered the city, blind indeed, and humbled in his own esteem, but as ready now to wait for Christian guidance as he had been a little before to destroy the Christian name.

The good Ananias came to him, obedient to Divine direction, though feeling somewhat as a lamb might do on entering a lion's den. But the lion was now a lamb. As the Christian visitor hailed him "brother," and said "receive thy sight," Saul's eyes opened, and rested on the wondering Ananias with a look of new born

affection and sympathy. Here, indeed, was a brother well won.

Then followed the baptism by which the new convert entered the fellowship of the Church; and then the commission to be a public witness to Jesus. In carrying to him the commission, Ananias naturally and necessarily spoke from the Jewish point of view, for the relation of Christianity to the Gentiles was at that period beyond the thoughts even of the twelve apostles, much more beyond the mental horizon of a private Jewish Christian living at Damascus. So Ananias gave the commission as from the God of the Hebrew fathers, and indicated the Lord Jesus by the title "the Just One," just as Stephen had done before the Council at Jerusalem. This last coincidence must have greatly struck the mind of Saul, on whom Stephen's address had already made a deep impression.

The Jewish cast of the whole story was skilfully reproduced by St Paul when he told it to the Jewish crowd. Why were they so frantic against him for bearing witness to that Just One as the Christ? What other course could he have taken after such a vision and revelation as he now described? And why should he be

deemed an enemy to God or to his nation for pursuing a career which, as he firmly believed, had been assigned to him by the God of his fathers?

So far the audience kept silence. These were wonderful facts, if true, which this bold speaker declared: no Jew would venture to say that visions and revelations from heaven were incredible; and thus far nothing had been uttered which even malice could construe into an attack on the law or on the customs of the nation.

But the apostle had to tell them of another vision, in order to account for the wide sweep which his testimony to the Just One had taken, and which had made him so obnoxious to those Jews from the province of Asia, who had raised the tumult against him.*

II. *The revelation of the Lord to St Paul in the Temple.*—In some respects this second story must have been more startling to the audience than the first. At that very temple, within those holy courts, Jesus, years after His crucifixion, had appeared and spoken to Paul!

It was at the time when he first preached in Jerusalem as a Christian, having been intro-

* Acts xxi. 27, 28.

duced to the Church by Barnabas. The Hellenist Jews even then plotted to kill him, and he was persuaded by his brethren in the faith to leave the city.* There was, however, another reason for his departure, not mentioned at that time by the historian, but divulged in this speech by St Paul himself. While praying in the Temple he had fallen into a trance, just as St Peter had done at Joppa, while praying on the house top. In the trance, St Paul then saw the Lord, who enjoined him to make haste and get quickly out of Jerusalem.

It is evident that the apostle had been resisting the entreaty of the brethren that he should save his life by flight. He even urged it on the Lord, that he might be allowed to remain in that long-sacred city. He loved his own people, Israel, so intensely, and was so reluctant to believe that they would reject his fervent testimony to Christ! Then he was, like his Master, so desirous, if it were possible, to save Jerusalem; and he pleaded that the knowledge which the citizens had of his recent hostility to the Christians would tend to con-

* Acts ix. 28-30.

vince them that he must have had very strong grounds for now taking up so different a position, and bearing, at every risk, a Christian testimony. St Paul perceived and felt, what in later times some of our English defenders of the faith have urged with great force, that his own conversion supplied one of the most powerful arguments for Christianity. But the Lord had given him in reply a distinct command—"Go! for I will send thee forth from hence to the Gentiles." And it was in obedience to his heavenly Master, not from any disloyalty to his own nation, or preference for other countries or races, that, during the twenty years which had elapsed between that vision and this riot in the Temple, the apostle had given his laborious days and nights to the service of Christ in foreign parts, not only to the Jews and proselytes in Gentile cities, but to the Gentiles themselves, thousands of whom had "turned from idols to serve the living God, and to wait for His Son from heaven."

But the speaker had dropped the word "Gentiles," and in a tone not of hatred, but of goodwill. It was intolerable to those fanatical Jews,

who regarded all nations but their own as unworthy to bear the name of God or of His Christ. In a moment all the conciliatory tenor of this speech was disregarded, and passionate cries again rose from the furious crowd, "Away with such a fellow from the earth!" In an excitement which only an Oriental mob can reach, they threw off their garments, and cast dust into the air. Happily the apostle was out of their reach; but "the chief captain," being ignorant of the language in which the speech had been delivered, appears to have inferred from this new outbreak of popular rage, that St Paul must have said something quite atrocious. Accordingly he proposed to "examine him by scourging, that he might know for what cause they so shouted against him."

This outrage was prevented by St Paul's affirmation of his Roman citizenship; and so he rested safely in the castle till the following day, when he spoke again in his own defence before the chief priests and the Sanhedrim.

One or two reflections suggest themselves—(1) How cruel is race-hatred, especially when intensified by religious prejudice. The tribes of

Israel were separated by the will of God from other tribes and nations, in order that they might preserve a heritage of truth for the benefit of the whole world, and that in Abraham's posterity all families of the earth might be blessed. But they gloried in their separation, as if it were appointed for their sakes, and marked their superiority to all mankind. They regarded themselves as favourites of heaven, conceived a scorn for other nations, and assumed that God was as narrow-minded as themselves. The Gentiles, to a considerable extent, reciprocated the scorn, and regarded the Jews not as a holy nation, but as an unsocial and obstinate race.

Through all the Christian centuries this miserable enmity has continued, and it shows itself in unabated strength in some countries of Europe at the present day. The Jews in their hearts despise the people among whom they live, outwit and fleece them without the slightest compunction, all the time assuming that the God of their fathers is with them, not only guardian of their national existence, but patron of their most bitter prejudices. On the other hand, Gentiles dislike and distrust the

Jews, and sometimes assail them with hard words, and harder deeds. It is all wrong and displeasing to God. It is bad humanity and bad divinity. It is an Eastern race feud, increased and inflamed by false and narrow conceptions of the character and will of God. It might and would have been corrected eighteen centuries ago, if the Jews had not rejected the Gospel which was sent to them first and then to all the nations, and if they had not refused the teaching of one to whom the Gentiles listened—a man who has cast more honour on the Jewish name than all the Rabbis of whom the synagogues can boast—Paul, the Jew, of Tarsus.

(2.) How great the change which the grace of Christ can effect in man! That fierce and angry mob, shouting for the blood of this man of God, was in his view a hideous illustration of what he himself had been in the days when he "breathed out threatening and slaughter" against the followers of Jesus. But now what they hated, and he had hated, he loved with all his heart and soul. Old things had passed away; all things were made new.

Let it not be said of any man that he is too far from Christ, or too much opposed to the

Gospel, ever to be converted. Least of all, let this be said of one who acts from views of duty however mistaken, and obeys a conscience however misinformed and prejudiced. It is well that there is a moral nature to be wrought upon; well that there is a conscience which may be enlightened. Prayer should be made for men of earnest purpose who are against the Gospel, whether they are influenced by superstition or by infidelity. Their case is not hopeless, for He who made of the persecutor, Saul, not only a believer, but a persuasive and powerful witness to the truth, and a chosen vessel to bear the name of Jesus, knows how to reveal Himself to men whom ordinary methods do not reach, and to turn vehement assailants into devout and courageous champions of the faith.

XII.

ST PAUL AT CÆSAREA TO FELIX.

"AND when the governor had beckoned unto him to speak, Paul answered, Forasmuch as I know that thou hast been of many years a judge unto this nation, I do cheerfully make my defence: seeing that thou canst take knowledge, that it is not more than twelve days since I went up to worship at Jerusalem: and neither in the temple did they find me disputing with any man or stirring up a crowd, nor in the synagogues, nor in the city. Neither can they prove to thee the things whereof they now accuse me. But this I confess unto thee, that after the Way which they call a sect, so serve I the God of our fathers, believing all things which are according to the law, and which are written in the prophets: having hope toward God, which these also themselves look for, that there shall be a resurrection both of the just and unjust. Herein do I also exercise myself to have a conscience void of offence toward God and men alway. Now after many years I came to bring alms to my nation, and offerings: amidst which they found me purified in the temple, with no crowd, nor yet with tumult: but there were certain Jews from Asia—who ought to have been here before thee, and to make accusation, if they had aught against me. Or else let these men themselves say what wrong-doing they found, when I stood before the council, except it be for this one voice, that I cried standing among them, Touching the resurrection of the dead I am called in question before you this day."—ACTS xxiv. 10-21.

WE have to do no longer with the proclamation of the Gospel by a missionary in the synagogue or in the open air, but with

the defence made by an accused prisoner before a Roman governor in his hall or court of justice. Felix, who was ruler, or as the title ran, Procurator of Palestine, sat on the judgment-seat. Before him appeared the High Priest from Jerusalem, attended by certain of the elders, to arraign Paul of Tarsus. The fact that such dignitaries of the Jewish nation had come so far in person to lay this accusation, showed what importance they attached to their plea. But they mistrusted their own competency to conduct a cause in this Gentile court, and therefore were represented by counsel. Tertullus, a Latin rhetorician or advocate, was engaged to speak in their behalf. Then St Paul was brought from the guard-room of the palace, and stood face to face with his accusers. It was a new place of witness for the much tried man. We may be sure that he had prayed for grace sufficient, and it was given to him in that hour what he should speak.

The counsel for the prosecution opened in a speech, of which St Luke has given us a condensed report. He began with most obsequious flattery of the Procurator, affecting, in name of the Jews, to place in him unbounded confidence,

whereas it is certain from historians of the period, that Felix was an unjust and cruel, and therefore an extremely unpopular governor.

The cringing tones in which Tertullus addressed the judge gave place to unsparing severity of language when he accused the prisoner. The charges which he laid against St Paul were three—(1) That he was a public pest, everywhere promoting disturbance and exciting a factious temper among the Jews; (2) That he was a ringleader of a new and troublesome sect, known as "the Nazarenes;" (3) That, out of sheer wickedness, he had attempted to profane the Temple. These were not offences of which the Roman law took cognisance; therefore it was urged that this man should be handed over for trial to the Jewish tribunal, the Sanhedrim. It was intimated to the Procurator that Paul would have been dealt with already by that council, had not the Roman commandant at Jerusalem snatched him out of their hands. Of the murderous tumult from which Paul had been rescued, and of the foul conspiracy to assassinate him from which he had escaped to Cæsarea, Tertullus conveniently said nothing.

No witnesses were called, apart from the company of accusers. Their object, indeed, was not to have a sentence pronounced by Felix, but to induce him to remit the prisoner to the Jewish council, with permission to the council to pass what sentence and inflict what penalty they pleased. Therefore the Jews followed up the speech of their counsel by strong assertions corroborative of the charges which he had made. In this, however, they rather outwitted themselves; for every one in the court, the Procurator not excepted, must have seen what a mockery of justice it would be to hand over an accused man to a tribunal in which those angry fanatics would sit as judges.

Felix said nothing, but beckoned to the accused that he might proceed with his defence. "Then Paul answered for himself." He was calm, lucid, fearless, and full of a self-respecting and truth-respecting dignity.

The contrast between his preamble and that of Tertullus strikes every reader. The hired orator, being insincere, overacted his part, and paid compliments to Felix which every one in the judgment-hall knew to be false. The

apostle began with all due deference and courtesy, but, in regard to the judge, contented himself with saying what was strictly true, viz., that Felix having been Procurator in Judea for an unusually long term of years, and therefore familiar with the Jewish calendar and customs, was all the better able to understand the hollowness of the charges which Tertullus had uttered. The governor knew when the Feast of Pentecost took place, how short the time since Paul had arrived at Jerusalem to worship at that feast, and how absurd it was to denounce him as a hardened mischief maker in the Holy City.

To the first and third allegations laid against him, St Paul gave a flat contradiction, and challenged his accusers to prove them. He had not stirred confusion and uproar, either in Jewish synagogues elsewhere, or in the streets of Jerusalem. He had not desecrated the Temple, but was there by right as a devout Israelite. It was not those elders of Jerusalem who had found him in the Temple, but certain foreign Jews from the province of Asia, who were not present to give their testimony, as they might have been, and ought to have been,

if they had any serious charge against him. This last point, even had there been no other in the defence, was sufficient to prevent a sentence of condemnation; and when Tertullus heard it, he must have admired the unprofessional skill of the prisoner, and must have known that the case for the prosecution was lost. A Roman citizen could not be found guilty in a Roman court on the accusation of parties who had not been present when the alleged offence was said to have been committed, while the persons who were present and could have given testimony at first hand, were absent from the court, and were not even mentioned by the prosecutor.

It was not for the apostle to prove his own innocence. Enough for him to show the inherent improbability of the only precise charge brought against him—that of stirring up tumults at Jerusalem and desecrating the Temple, and to point to the significant circumstance that the witnesses who could have proved the offence if it had been committed, were absent to a man. Then we can well imagine him look firmly in the face that wretched Sadducean High Priest with whom he had already had a sharp en-

counter of words in the council chamber, and those hard-hearted elders who, with the High Priest, sought the suppression of his testimony by the taking of his life; and we can hear him defy the whole vindictive company to prove these charges. "Neither can they prove to thee the things whereof they now accuse me."

So much for the first and third charges; but the second count of indictment was thought by St Paul to need a more affirmative answer. Tertullus, acting under instructions, had stigmatised him as "a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes." In reply, the apostle spoke frankly of "the Way" which he had followed, and the convictions he had formed. He saw in this an opening for some useful testimony. "But this I confess unto thee, that after the Way which they call a sect, so serve I the God of our fathers."

"Heresy" is the word used both by Tertullus and by Paul. That Greek term was used to denote a separating party or sect. We read of "the heresy (sect) of the Sadducees,"* and of "the heresy (sect) of the Pharisees."† But as the word in its English form is taken to mean

* Acts v. 17. † Acts xv. 5.

an unorthodox or heterodox opinion, we are obliged, in order to express the thought of St Paul, to change his term, and say "sect of the Nazarenes." Such was the light in which the first Christians were commonly regarded. They were a sect or party like the Herodians or Essenes. When the Jews at Rome sought information from St Paul on his arrival in that city, they said — "As concerning this heresy (sect) we know that it is everywhere spoken against."*

The imputation on Christianity that it was no better than a crotchet of some Jewish separatists who broke away from the main current of the national religious thought and life was not only inaccurate, but extremely offensive to one who saw so clearly and comprehensively as St Paul did the relation of Christianity to Judaism as its efflorescence and its glory. But he contented himself with the disclaimer implied in the expression—"which they call a sect;" and proceeded to maintain, as he had taught everywhere, that the Christian faith was no departure from the ancestral religion of Israel, but was its issue and perfection.

* Acts xxviii. 22.

He did not on this occasion introduce the name of the Nazarene. Nothing had been adduced against the Saviour's cause further than this foolish allegation that the Nazarenes were a sect of unruly separatists, and that Paul as a leader of them stirred up animosity and uproar wherever he went. So the apostle, being on his defence in a court of justice, spoke to this point, and showed that he and his brethren were not sectaries, but faithful Israelites. They served no new or strange god, but only the God of their fathers. And they rejected no part of the Old Testament canon of Scripture, but held to the law and the prophets.

The High Priest and the Sanhedrim regarded the Nazarenes as heretics or sectaries because they presumed to differ from the authorities in regard to Jesus, whom the council had condemned, just as the Pope and all the leaders of the Latin Church denounced the Reformers of the 16th century as heretics or sectaries because they presumed to differ from them regarding the grace of Christ and the freeness of the gospel. St Paul opened a deeper question. Were they or were they not true to Holy Scripture? Were they not faithful to the

hope which Scripture warranted? This question he was always ready, nay eager, to discuss. But the rulers of the Jews, unable to meet him in argument, tried to crush him by the violence of mobs, and arraigned him before Gentile governors both in Europe and in Asia, that without law or under forms of law the heretic might die. In like manner the Reformers were always eager to show that they fairly interpreted and conscientiously followed Holy Scripture; but the chief priests and ecclesiastical magnates of the traditional church, unable to refute them on such ground, denounced them as pestilent heretics, and tried to crush them by the strong secular arm of the Emperor and the Princes of Europe.

We have said that St Paul in his defence said nothing of the Lord Jesus, for the sacred name was not mentioned in the speech of accusation. Neither did he touch the question of the Messiahship of Jesus, because it had not been mooted by Tertullus; and it was not a topic which Felix, as a heathen, could very well understand or judge. But there were two points which had excited great discussion when the apostle stood before the council at Jeru-

salem; and these he brought up again as the real matters in dispute between him and the High Priest. It must have been as gall and wormwood to the vain Pontiff, Ananias, to hear the very statements which he had hotly resented in the Sanhedrim a few days before now calmly reproduced while he was there, not seated as a presiding judge, but standing as a baffled accuser, and compelled to listen to this bold defence.

1. *The claim to a good conscience.*—Before the council St Paul had said—"I have lived before God in all good conscience until this day." At the word the High Priest, with monstrous unfairness, had bidden the officers of the court smite the apostle on the mouth, and the outrage drew from Paul a stinging retort. But now Ananias had to stand silent while Paul said, "Herein do I exercise myself to have a conscience void of offence toward God and man alway." This did not prove that he was right either in theory or in practice, for conscience may be misinformed and misguided; but it went to show that Paul was no unruly person or reckless plotter of sedition. Also it helped him to stand unabashed before the Procurator,

and before his own accusing countrymen. He had done them no wrong. He had not marred the service of God; he had not disturbed the peace of society among either Jews or Gentiles, though evil men had risen up against him. He had been careful to avoid offence, and to walk in his duty towards God and man.

2. *The hope of the resurrection of the dead.*—This had been avowed by St Paul before the council at Jerusalem, and thereupon a keen dispute had sprung up between the Pharisees who acknowledged and the Sadducees who disowned a future resurrection. Ananias, the High Priest, was a Sadducee, and sorely vexed he must have been to be compelled to listen to the prisoner not only expressing his own hope of the resurrection, but also assuring the Procurator that this was the belief of orthodox Israelites—"Which these also themselves look for, that there shall be a resurrection both of the just and of the unjust."

St Paul could have said much more of his Christian faith and hope; could have preached, as at other times, repentance and forgiveness of sins in the name of Lord Jesus. But "to everything there is a season." The apostle was not

there to preach salvation to sinners, but was defending his life and liberty before a tribunal; and he did wisely to confine his speech to the charges which had been alleged against him. He concluded by telling to the Procurator the ground which he had taken up before that council, the representatives of which had come all the way to Cæsarea to prosecute him. Why should he not be at liberty to cherish a hope regarding the dead which was held by a large portion of the council? And why should he be surrendered to the malice of those, his accusers, who could not in the Roman court prove any "wrong-doing" against him?

The defence was conclusive. Obviously the case broke down. Felix knew more about the Way, *i.e.*, the Nazarene or Christian movement, than the accusing party from Jerusalem had supposed; and he saw clearly that his prisoner must not be surrendered to the Jewish council. If he had stirred sedition, of which there was no proof, the Roman authority, which was responsible for the public peace in all provinces of the Empire, should judge and sentence him. If he held an opinion or hope about the resurrection

of the dead, as he had admitted, Jewish authorities held the same opinion, and Roman law took no notice of such matters. A Roman citizen of Jewish extraction had a right to believe on a point of that nature as he pleased. So St Paul ought to have been released. But now the character of Felix began to show its bad side. He cared more for his own comfort than for justice. It might cost him trouble afterwards if he should give open offence to the High Priest and the important deputation that accompanied him, and send them back to Jerusalem ignominiously defeated. So selfish prudence, not righteousness, spoke from the judgment seat. The case was adjourned. Paul was remanded, but not to close confinement. His friends were allowed to visit him; and as there were a good many Christians at Cæsarea, no doubt they sought the society of the apostle, and lightened the hours of his confinement by their converse and sympathy. More than two years passed before Paul was permitted to leave that prison in the Herodian Palace, which was used as the Government House of the Roman Procurator; and, when he left it, he was a prisoner still.

During those years the apostle was well pro-

tected. Whatever the malice of the Jews, they could not molest him within a Roman stronghold. No doubt he deeply felt the loss of time for active ministry. What regions might he not have visited, in how many places might he not have planted the gospel, if it had not been for this vexatious detention! And then the Churches which he had founded, and those founded by others, which he had visited and helped, how did it fare with them? Were false teachers perplexing and scattering them, or were they standing true to their first faith in Christ Jesus? What a trial to St Paul that he could hear so little of them, and could not go to them during those critical years of their infancy! But the Lord had a wise and loving purpose in arranging for His servant this enforced pause in the midst of a laborious career. There can be little doubt that for many months before, Paul had been overtaxing his strength. His nervous temperament must have been strained and exhausted by the impassioned scenes through which he had passed, the clinging affection of his friends and the inveterate fury of his enemies. This mild imprisonment at Cæsarea gave him time

to recruit. Nor need we suppose that time hung heavy on his hands. Whether or not St Paul wrote any of his great epistles during this interval of forced retirement from the public eye, he had precious leisure for study and prayer, and must have prepared himself for subsequent efforts of writing and preaching, which told powerfully in his later ministry.

Nor was he quite without opportunity of exercising ministry, or bearing testimony to the truth, even during these two years at Cæsarea. Felix had enticed Drusilla from her husband, the Prince of Emesa, and married her. As she was a Jewess, he thought to gratify her by letting her see and hear his Jewish prisoner who could speak so well. When Paul was called before them, he did speak, but in a way that made the procurator tremble. He "reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come." Now Felix, as a ruler, had violated righteousness; as a man, had cast off temperance; and, both as a ruler and as a man, had cause to fear the judgment to come. Drusilla, more gentle in appearance, seems to have had the stouter heart, or she knew how to hide agitation under a calm exterior. Felix visibly quivered under the apostle's word.

Again, he got rid of the prisoner by the weak device of an adjournment. He felt the holy force of the preaching, and yet he would not do justice to the preacher. He would hear him again at a convenient time. It is sometimes said, but quite erroneously, that Felix never found that convenient season. Quite the contrary. He often sent for St Paul,—never again, so far as we know, in Drusilla's presence, "and communed with him." But he seems never to have trembled again. The instructive fact is that, so far as Felix was concerned, a covetous motive vitiated all those interviews. He sought a bribe for doing what it was his duty to do. He felt sure that a man of such ability and such importance to the Christian cause, could command a very considerable ransom. So "he hoped that Paul would have given him money."

Thus unhappy (*infelix*) Felix lost the conviction of conscience which once visited him, and might have proved the beginning of repentance. He lost this; and he gained nothing. He detained St Paul two whole years in expectation of a bribe, and bribe he got none. When himself recalled to Rome, he left the

apostle in prison at Cæsarea, in order to please the Jews; and the Jews, refusing to be propitiated, followed him to Rome with bitter accusations of his misconduct and misgovernment. He narrowly escaped capital punishment. He was obliged to disgorge the greater portion of his ill-gotten wealth, and died in obscurity and disgrace.

Many think they may do as they please with the preacher of the Gospel. They listen, or refuse to listen, as the mood seizes them. They open the ear to him when it is convenient, and then, if he presses them hard, put the matter off till some other convenient season. But it is an unseemly thing thus to play with the Gospel; and it is an extremely perilous thing to trifle with conviction or compunction of conscience, which men may indeed contrive to dismiss, but cannot, at their own pleasure, recall.

XIII.

ST PAUL AT CÆSAREA TO AGRIPPA.

"And Agrippa said unto Paul, Thou art permitted to speak for thyself. Then Paul stretched forth his hand, and made his defence: I think myself happy, king Agrippa, that I am to make my defence before thee this day touching all the things whereof I am accused by the Jews: especially because thou art expert in all customs and questions which are among the Jews: wherefore I beseech thee to hear me patiently. My manner of life then from my youth up, which was from the beginning among mine own nation, and at Jerusalem, know all the Jews; having knowledge of me from the first, if they be willing to testify, how that after the straitest sect of our religion I lived a Pharisee. And now I stand here to be judged for the hope of the promise made of God unto our fathers; unto which promise our twelve tribes, earnestly serving God night and day, hope to attain. And concerning this hope I am accused by the Jews, O king! Why is it judged incredible with you, if God doth raise the dead? I verily thought with myself, that I ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth. And this I also did in Jerusalem: and I both shut up many of the saints in prisons, having received authority from the chief priests, and when they were put to death, I gave my vote against them. And punishing them oftentimes in all the synagogues, I strove to make them blaspheme; and being exceedingly mad against them, I persecuted them even unto foreign cities. Whereupon as I journeyed to Damascus with the authority, and commission of the chief priests, at midday, O king, I saw on the way a light

from heaven, above the brightness of the sun, shining round about me and them that journeyed with them. And when we were all fallen to the earth, I heard a voice saying unto me in the Hebrew language, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? it is hard for thee to kick against the goad. And I said, Who art thou Lord? And the Lord said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest. But arise, and stand upon thy feet: for to this end have I appeared unto thee, to appoint thee a minister and a witness both of the things wherein thou hast seen me, and of the things wherein I will appear unto thee; delivering thee from the people, and from the Gentiles, unto whom I send thee, to open their eyes, that they might turn from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they receive remission of sins and an inheritance among them that are sanctified by faith in me. Wherefore, O king Agrippa, I was not disobedient unto the heavenly vision: but declared both to them of Damascus first, and at Jerusalem, and throughout all the country of Judæa, and also to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, doing works worthy of repentance. For this cause the Jews seized me in the temple, and assayed to kill me. Having therefore obtained the help that is from God, I stand unto this day testifying both to small and great, saying nothing but what the prophets and Moses did say should come; how that the Christ must suffer, and how that he first by the resurrection of the dead should proclaim light both to the people and to the Gentiles. And as he thus made his defence, Festus saith with a loud voice, Paul, thou art mad; thy much learning doth turn thee to madness. Paul saith, I am not mad, most excellent Festus; but speak forth words of truth and soberness. For the king knoweth of these things, unto whom also I speak freely: for I am persuaded that none of these things is hidden from him; for this hath not been done in a corner. King Agrippa, believest thou the prophets? I know that thou believest. And Agrippa said unto Paul, With but little persuasion thou wouldest fain make me a Christian. And Paul said, I would to God, that whether with little or with much, not thou only, but also all that hear me this day, might become such as I am, except these bonds. And

the king rose up, and the governor, and Bernice, and they that that sat with them: and when they had withdrawn, they spake one to another, saying, This man doeth nothing worthy of death or of bonds. And Agrippa said unto Festus, This man might have been set at liberty, if he had not appealed unto Cæsar.—Acts xxvii.

THIS speech resembles the two which precede it in being a personal defence, but it was delivered under circumstances of much less acute personal danger. The speech to the crowd at Jerusalem was spoken when they were clamouring for the speaker's death, and were only restrained by the swords of the Roman soldiery. The speech before the procurator Felix was uttered by a prisoner on trial, with all the risk of condemnation by a judge who had few scruples, and was quite open to a bribe. More recently St Paul had been again called into court by the new procurator, Festus, and had been again accused by Jews from Jerusalem. He saw the governor inclining to surrender him to the Jewish Sanhedrim, from a desire to ingratiate himself with his new and very troublesome subjects. A word—a nod—from Festus, and the fate of the apostle would have been sealed. So he cut the matter short, before it should be too late, by claiming his right as a Roman

citizen to be heard at the emperor's judment-seat. "I appeal unto Cæsar." In a moment the Jews were baffled. Festus conferred with the councillors who sat with him as assessors or advisers in the court. They could only assure him that the appeal was well taken and could not be refused. So far as the provincial tribunals were concerned, the case was at an end. The prisoner must be sent to Rome. With a curtness of speech which perhaps came from a feeling of annoyance at this unexpected turn in the affair, the procurator said: "To Cæsar shalt thou go!" From such a Cæsar as then occupied the imperial throne, what justice or mercy could this unfriended Jew expect!

Now was St Paul quite safe till the appeal should be heard. Therefore, when he was summoned once more into the audience-hall of the palace at Cæsarea, and found himself in the august presence, not only of Festus himself, but of his guests, the young King Agrippa, with his sister Berenice, surrounded by the chief officers of the garrison and other magnates of the place, he knew that it was not a criminal court in which he stood. He had neither to fear condemnation nor to hope for liberty.

The occasion was made by the procurator for two reasons. (1) To gratify his royal guest, who, as one of the Herodian family, knew Jewish matters well, and had expressed a desire to hear this famous Paul whom the Sanhedrim had for years denounced as an arch-heretic. (2) To find out, if possible, some fault or ground of charge which might be stated against the prisoner in his report to the emperor. Felix had left Paul bound, but had left no record of the offence or offences of which he was alleged to be guilty; and the passionate outcries of the Jews in the trial before Festus had left no distinct impression on the governor's mind.

St Paul was brought in. He stood alone, pale from long confinement, and wearing fetters; a startling contrast to the gay company seated or reclining on their gilt couches —the young king, the fair princess, the splendidly-attired Roman procurator, with all his officers and grandees. But those pomps and dignities had no power to dazzle a mind like his. We may be sure that he bore himself becomingly, for there never was a more thorough gentleman than St Paul; but he paid no ob-

sequious court to those before whom he was brought, and craved no favour or pity at their hands. Festus courteously yielded the initiative to his guest; so it was Agrippa who broke silence, and bade the apostle speak for himself, Then without hesitation the orator began, and with his habitual earnestness of purpose used the great opportunity thus given to him to make known to the distinguished assembly not merely his own history, but something also of that Saviour and Lord whom he served, and of that Gospel which it was the purpose and passion of his life to proclaim. The entire absence of any tone of complaint or even of selfish anxiety gives a singular dignity to this oration. It was Paul who had the princely spirit, though Agrippa and Festus sat in the princely seats.

The speech opened with that fine tact and courtesy in which the speaker never failed. No word of flattery did he address to the king, but he well and neatly said, that he deemed it quite an advantage to tell his story to one so expert in customs and questions of the Jews. This was strictly true of Agrippa, who was the last scion of the Herodian stock, and had been

carefully trained in the Jewish law and casuistry by his father, that Herod Agrippa who killed the Apostle James at Jerusalem, and, when he saw that it pleased the Jews, seized the Apostle Peter also.

The attitude of St Paul with outstretched hand, and the dignified politeness of his opening sentence, must have arrested the attention, not of the young king only, but of all the brilliant throng. The apostle proceeded to unfold his tale. Once more he went over the story of his early life as a zealous Pharisee, and his bitter persecution of those of his own nation who followed and loved Jesus of Nazareth. He had treated as evil doers those whom he now perceived to have been saints. He had done it in a conscientious but grievously mistaken madness of rage against them. He dwelt on this part of his history more fully than in any previous address, for now he understood more clearly and felt more deeply than ever before, what it was to be persecuted by Pharisees, and condemned by the High Priest and the Council, and shut up in prison for the name and faith of Jesus. What he himself had suffered, and was still suffering, recalled more

vividly and circumstantially to his memory and conscience what wrongs he had in his blind youth inflicted on inoffensive Christians.

Then he told of the vision on the way to Damascus, and that also more fully and minutely than before. The additions are interesting. *e.g.* When the apostle addressed the mob at the Temple in Jerusalem, he spoke Hebrew or Hebraic, and, therefore, did not mention, for the people would assume it, that the words which he heard from the Lord as he neared Damascus were spoken "in the Hebrew tongue." But he brought out this particular when speaking in Greek to this company at Cæsarea. It is here too that the expression is first reported—"It is hard for thee to kick against the goads," for in the history in Acts ix. it has been interpolated. This seems to have been a proverb among the ancients to denote a vain opposition to superior power. It was taken from the fields, where oxen, used in husbandry, were both guided and spurred forward by strong sharp goads. It was vain for the pricked ox to kick. The occurrence of the proverb here shows that, as was His custom on earth, so also in His communication from

heaven, the Lord Jesus thought best to employ familiar human speech.

We also gather from this address that the commission for ministry and apostleship which the Lord intended for Saul of Tarsus was revealed to him from the beginning with much more fulness than appears from either of the previous accounts of his conversion—whether St Luke's narrative (Acts ix.) or St Paul's own statement (Acts xxii.). It is possible, however, that the speaker, desirous to put before his audience in as brief compass as possible the high commission with which he was charged, joined to the words actually spoken on the way to Damascus the further directions which he received at that city, and in the subsequent vision at Jerusalem. In that case, the words of the 16th verse may be read as a summary of all that the Lord had on several occasions revealed to His servant—"I have appeared unto thee, to appoint thee a minister and a witness."

The commission to preach both to the people (Israel) and to the Gentiles, as given in verse 18, is full of importance, because couched in the very words of the exalted Saviour. The order

is significant—beginning at Jerusalem, then going out to all nations—first trying to save the lost sheep of the house of Israel, then rescuing other sheep, not of that fold. The action prescribed to this "minister and witness" is significant also. He was to enlighten the people and the Gentiles, that they might turn themselves from darkness to light,* and from the power of Satan which brooded over the world, to God. Further, their conversion was to be sought in order that Jews and Gentiles might obtain, through faith in Jesus Christ, the blessings of salvation. These are described under two heads—(1) Forgiveness of sins freely; (2) An inheritance among the sanctified, or, as this apostle has elsewhere expressed it, to be "fellow citizens with the saints, and of the household of God."

St Paul then assured the king that, from the day in which he had received this sacred commission, he had endeavoured to carry it out both in Judea and in the Gentile countries. He durst not disobey the heavenly vision; and it was from no restless or turbulent disposition, but because he felt bound to follow the direction

* Comp. Isa. xlii. 6, 7; 1 Pet. ii. 9, 10.

of the Lord from heaven, that he had pursued a course which unhappily roused against him the antipathy of Jesus-rejecting Jews. For this course of ministry and testimony, and not for any crime as they pretended, had they tried to kill him at Jerusalem. But, say or do what they might, his conscience was clear, and he rejoiced that thus far God had helped him to publish the Gospel. Let governors and princes beware lest, in detaining him, they should be found fighting against God. None of the plots of the Jews against him had succeeded. He continued till that day, witnessing both to small and great. His testimony in no wise dishonoured Moses and the prophets, but, on the contrary, honoured them by showing the fulfilment of ancient oracles in the Christ who had suffered and risen again. Nor was the light brought to Israel only: it was turned to the Gentiles also. Let the Jewish prince and princess think of it; let the Roman procurator and his officers think of it. The apostle had a treasure of light and salvation for them all.

He was in the full tide of ardent speech, when an exclamation from Festus interrupted him. It was a common thing with St Paul to

be interrupted, for he was one of those speakers who draw blood. His words had an edge and force that told upon his hearers, and made it impossible for them to continue apathetic. Often he made some rage, as well as some exult for joy. But Festus did not understand him sufficiently either to rage or to rejoice. The speech had gone quite beyond his reach of ideas. Visions from heaven, fulfilment of old prophecies, and a resurrection from the dead. What weak stuff is this! thought the heathen Roman. This man's brain must be sick and troubled—perhaps enfeebled by hard treatment. And then, knowing that Paul was a man of study, Festus thought it best to ascribe his strange statements to an over-tasked and unsound mind. "Thou ravest! much learning doth turn thee to madness." Thus this man, though meaning no harm, checked and spoiled by his stupid impatience a speech which, even in its broken form, attracts the wonder and praise of many generations, like one of those exquisite columns in the Roman Forum or Athenian Acropolis which, though broken by the assault of barbarians, attract us more than many unbroken pillars of inferior art.

The apostle, always self-possessed, replied to his Excellency that he did not rave, but was "speaking words of truth and soberness." Then he appealed directly to Agrippa, who had been listening with an intelligent appreciation which could not be expected of the heathen governor. The king would not deny that Jesus had suffered, and was believed by many to have risen again. The thing was notorious in the whole country, and had not been done in a corner. The king would not deride an argument founded on the books of Hebrew prophets, for he had been trained to believe those prophets from his youth.

The procurator could not, with any courtesy to his guest, stop such an appeal as this. It was Agrippa who had given the sign that the speaker should begin; and so long as the king chose to hear him, he should be allowed to proceed. But now Agrippa spoke. He knew well that the exclamation of Festus was a foolish one, but he did not like to be pressed so hard, as St Paul was pressing him, in regard to his own convictions. In this respect he bore an ominous resemblance to his uncle, Herod Antipas, who was desirous to see Jesus as Agrippa

had been to see Paul, but treated the most serious matters lightly, and ended all with mockery. Agrippa indeed did not deride the apostle, as Antipas mocked the Saviour, and set Him at nought, but he stopped the sober words of St Paul with a light sarcasm. Here again he makes us think of Pontius Pilate who, hearing the Lord Jesus say that every one who was of the truth would hear His voice, escaped from the gravity of the statement by a sarcastic question, "What is truth?"

Very likely Agrippa had uncomfortable qualms and misgivings while the apostle spoke. The family to which he belonged had been fatally implicated with the name and cause of Jesus of Nazareth. His grandfather, Herod the Great, had tried to kill this Jesus in infancy. His uncle had killed John the Baptist, and had mocked Jesus Himself on the morning of His crucifixion. His father had killed one and imprisoned another of the three who had been the most intimate friends of Jesus. And now this famous witness for Jesus spoke to him, and wanted to fasten question upon him. What if this earnest man were right, and all the Herods had been wrong! It was enough to make the

young prince pause; but he was one of those men—and they are not few—who hate qualms of conscience, and slip away from awkward questions and disagreeable situations as deftly as they can.

The exact turn of his expression it is not easy to reproduce in English. "Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian" reads well, and catches the memory, but is not an accurate translation. The Revised Version is clumsy—"With but little persuasion thou wouldst fain make me a Christian." The meaning certainly is either "with little trouble," or "in little time," *i.e.*, "very summarily," or "offhand you are making a Christian of me!" Agrippa was more impressed than he wished to acknowledge, and therefore he threw a sort of good-humoured irony into his tone—"Not so fast, good Paul! You must not think that you will offhand convert a king." The many sermons, and the books that have been written on "the almost Christian," have no doubt done good service, but they do not properly rise out of the exclamation of Agrippa, who never thought of being an almost or undecided Christian, but declined to be summarily turned into a real Christian.

St Paul penetrated the motive of the king, and on the spur of the moment gave an answer worthy of the occasion, and worthy of a servant of God. Serene in temper, devout in spirit, he expressed not a wish only, but a prayer to God, that all who heard him on that day might anyway (by little or by much) become as he was, except as to his bonds. What a man was this by the grace of God! A solitary prisoner standing before princes and nobles, so sustained by faith and a good conscience, that he felt himself in a region quite above them, and prayed for them all that they might be lifted up to the possession and enjoyment of the same inward peace and heavenly hope! A prisoner who, though no crime had been proved against him, had been unjustly confined for more than two years, and yet, when he looked at the fetters on his arms, showed no feeling of anger or vindictiveness against any of those who inflicted on him such suffering and ignominy without cause, desired not that they should ever endure what he had endured, but to his prayer for their salvation calmly added the pathetic words—"except as to these bonds."

Some sense of the inherent grandeur of the

man and his mission fell on the shallow heart of Agrippa, and perhaps on many others in the hall. The king, without a word, rose from his seat; and it was the signal for all to rise, and for the prisoner to be withdrawn. It was agreed on all sides that Paul was an ill-used man. Agrippa distinctly said to Festus, that but for the appeal to Rome, the prisoner should at once be released. Thus sound advice often comes too late. Felix ought to have seen this long before. Indeed he did see it, but for sordid reasons would not do justice to Paul. Festus should have seen it, and not, through his complaisance to the Jews, have compelled the apostle to take appeal to Cæsar. One ruler after another blundered over the case, and did injustice; but the counsel of God was in all this, that St Paul should go to Rome and bear most memorable and influential witness to Jesus Christ in the capital city of the world.

"He has done nothing worthy of bonds," said the king, and then passed on with his sister to some change of scene, and turned from one pleasure to another, forgetting all. So far as we know, Agrippa never so much as said another word, or lifted a finger to have justice

done to that saintly man, or ever again in all his life came so near being a Christian as in that short half-hour at Cæsarea.

Those in our own time who defeat the word of the Lord by a superficial habit of thought, or deflect its edge from their conscience with some kind expression toward the preacher, or some light phrase about becoming a Christian, should take warning from the case of Herod Agrippa. He was young and well-instructed in the Scriptures—two important elements in favour of his conversion; but he was "a lover of pleasures," and the seed sown by St Paul found in him "no depth of earth." There are too many young and well-educated persons still who "like a good sermon," and are quite willing to listen to it, and who say of the preacher—not merely he is not worthy of bonds, but he is worthy of praise, and who sometimes have shooting pains of conscience when the preacher directly appeals to them, but will not yield to persuasion there and then. They rise and go away. Other objects catch their eyes. Lighter themes glide into their thoughts. What comes of all their approval

of the preacher—his arguments and appeals? Nothing. Worse than nothing. A heart more hardened still. The flesh and the world win the day; salvation is neglected, and the Saviour despised!

XIV.

ST PAUL TO JEWS AT ROME.

"And when they had appointed him a day, they came to him into his lodging in great number; to whom he expounded the matter, testifying the kingdom of God, and persuading them concerning Jesus, both from the law of Moses and from the prophets, from morning till evening. And some believed the things which were spoken, and some disbelieved. And when they agreed not among themselves, they departed, after that Paul had spoken one word, Well spake the Holy Ghost by Isaiah the prophet unto your fathers, saying, Go thou unto this people, and say, by hearing ye shall hear, and shall in no wise understand; and seeing ye shall see, and shall in no wise perceive: for this people's heart is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes they have closed; lest haply they should perceive with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and should turn again, and I should heal them. Be it known therefore unto you, that this salvation of God is sent unto the Gentiles: they will also hear."
—Acts xxviii. 23-28.

AT last Paul was in Rome. He had long desired to see the Christians there, and his heart was full of solemn joy when, after passing through great perils of the deep, he found himself in Italy, and drew near to the imperial city. At the Market of Appius and

the Three Taverns, a few miles out, he was met by brethren from Rome, "Whom, when he saw, he thanked God and took courage." Fraternal sympathy was always dear to him, and never more welcome than at the threshold of the city where he must needs "stand before Cæsar."

Even in the dark night on the stormy Adriatic he had not been allowed to doubt that he would reach Rome. An angel had told him that he would certainly stand before the emperor, and therefore both he and all who were in the ship would be saved from the deep. But other thoughts besides that of his own safety or danger occupied his mind when the brethren met him in the way. If documents regarding Paul had been sent along with him, they had doubtless been lost in the shipwreck, and a long time might elapse before his appeal could be heard by the emperor. How could he best employ the interval for the ends of his ministry? How could he best help those brethren in the faith? And what could he do to spread the faith, especially among those of his own race who lived in Rome? Then as now, the Jews flocked to populous cities. The number of them then resident at Rome is com-

puted on good grounds at 60,000. To them the first thoughts of St Paul turned, for this noble-hearted man could not be alienated from his own nation by ever so many injuries inflicted on him in other places by the malice of the Jews. No doubt he spoke with the brethren on their way into the city, of a fresh attempt to win those Jews to Christianity: and soon after he reached the quarters assigned to him by the authorities, he began to take his measures for preaching "first to the Jew." We have seen that at Pisidian Antioch, at Athens, and elsewhere, he repaired to the synagogues, and there found the audience he desired. But this course was not possible at Rome, because he was now a prisoner confined to his quarters in custody of a soldier. He therefore invited the chief men of the Jewish community to the house where he lived; and, addressing them as brethren, endeavoured by kindly explanation to remove from their minds any unfavourable impression of his attitude towards the nation and its ancestral customs which they might have received from hostile reports. The Jews replied, cautiously enough, that they had received no letters or reports from Judea to his

detriment. They were willing to hear what he had to advance; but at the same time did not conceal from him that the sect of the Nazarenes with which he was identified had a bad repute everywhere among Jews. Rightly or not, it was "spoken against;" and the manner in which they said this implied that in their opinion, the sect deserved no good opinion. Paul might show them his chains, and represent himself as bound therewith "for the hope of Israel;" but the current impression among Jews was that Nazarenes rejected the hope of Israel, and turned away from Moses and the prophets.

This was not encouraging to the apostle, but at all events it was a point gained, that his countrymen had come, and were willing to hear him. They were not so furiously prejudiced against him as the mob at Jerusalem who shouted that he was not fit to live. So he closed at once with the offer of his visitors: and a day was fixed on which the house should be open to all Jews who might be willing to come together, and Paul should be patiently heard. We may feel sure that in the interval, the "prisoner of Christ" prayed earnestly, and

the Christians in Rome prayed too, that an occasion so critical in view of the future of both Israel and the Church, might be turned to best account.

The day came, and from an early hour the house was filled with Jews. Then St Paul began. He had not to make a personal defence, as at Jerusalem and Cæsarea. He had to speak of the hope of Israel. It was a subject which had occupied his thoughts for many years, and which he had thoroughly mastered. So he entered on a full exposition of the writings to which all his hearers attached sacred authority, and showed how the law of Moses and the books of the prophets bore on the now instituted kingdom of God and the now proclaimed name of Jesus. This exposition occupied the whole day from morning till evening, with necessary breaks, no doubt, and pauses for questions and answers.

But where is the speech? We are ready and eager to catch the apostle's words, and find to our regret that St Luke has not reported them. In like manner the same writer has informed us that the Lord Jesus delivered a Christian exposition of the Old Testament to the disciples

after His resurrection, but has not preserved it, or even a part of it, for our use.* It is quite probable that the explanation of passages from the Old Testament which are found in St Paul's epistles formed part of his exposition by word of mouth at Rome, and were derived from the earlier expositions of the Lord Jesus piously repeated by those who heard Him. But the entire omission of the consecutive discourse is none the less significant. It seems to us to indicate that God did not and does not now wish His Church on earth to be furnished once for all with an authorised interpretation of Scripture which should discourage or supersede searching and study of the holy oracles by successive generations of Christian scholars, and reduce the keenness of scrutiny which is excited by the very uncertainty of our exegesis. The multiplicity of suggestions may be puzzling, the diversity of commentaries may surprise and perplex some minds; but this is better than the suppression of all activity of thought over the pages of Scripture by the dictation of one authorised and infallible interpretation.

This consideration bears severely on the

* Luke xxiv. 27, 44-46.

claim of authority which is made for the voice of tradition and of the Church as entitled to fix the sense of Holy Writ. If it was right to deprive the early Church of any record in New Testament books of that exposition of the Old Testament which was delivered by the Lord Jesus, or that which was delivered by St Paul, how can it be maintained that an authorised interpretation is good and necessary now? Even if this could be proved, we should have to inquire further—why the Church of Rome expects us to go to her alone for such authentic and unalterable instruction? But we dispute the first position that it is according to the Divine intention or desire that all Christians should be put under a prescribed and uniform interpretation of sacred Scripture. So saying, we do not disparage all traditional interpretation or deny the respect due to Christian antiquity. The Lord has given teachers to His people; and what is inculcated by a succession of teachers is the more on that account entitled to attention. But complete and infallible commentary there is none. Neither ancient fathers nor modern clergy have a right to claim such authority for their expositions; and those of

Jesus Christ and His servant Paul, to which all must have deferred, have been purposely omitted from the sacred record.

Though we have not St Paul's speech on this occasion, and the relevancy of this chapter in a study of apostolic speeches may be called in question, we know the great themes on which he spoke while supporting all his statements from Moses and the prophets. They were two—

1. *He "testified the kingdom of God."*—And subsequently, during "two whole years" at Rome, receiving all comers, he preached the kingdom of God. He was at Rome, the seat of empire. Living near the Pretorian camp, he must have heard constantly the tread of legions and the clang of arms—signs of the military power which had subdued the world. But the spirit of the good apostle occupied itself far more with thoughts of a greater kingdom—one which makes very little of the things on which the Roman Empire rested, but very much of "righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost." Cæsar's kingdom was soon to dwindle, but the kingdom of God was to extend far beyond the bounds of the Empire as its utmost

stretch, to "regions Cæsar never knew," to cast its skirt over all nations, and reach to the uttermost parts of the earth. It was easy for St Paul to show to his Jewish audience that David, Isaiah, and other prophets whom they professed to honour, had foretold such a kingdom — a reign of God over men, not in little Palestine only, but in every region under heaven.

This kingdom the apostle testified and preached. He announced that the time long appointed for its beginning had arrived. Already it was among men. And, as for himself, far from preferring the imperialism of Cæsar, which appeared to dominate the world; far from being disposed to abandon hopes which the prophets had breathed from days of old into the Hebrew breast; he was there to proclaim that God was now commencing the fulfilment of that hope, and making known the powers of a kingdom of heaven on the earth, into which it was the privilege of the Jews to enter first, if they would repent and believe the Gospel.

2. *He persuaded his hearers "concerning Jesus."*—So also for two years thereafter St Paul taught to all comers "the things concern-

ing the Lord Jesus Christ." Indefinite as the statement is, we can easily conjecture the course which the apostle followed. He showed from the Scriptures, as at other times, that the Messiah was destined to be rejected and slain, and thereafter to be raised from the dead. Then he told, as recent matter of fact, how all this was fulfilled in Jesus, who was consequently exalted as Lord and Christ; and raising his own thought and the thoughts of his hearers above the power of that human incarnation of absolute authority, the Cæsar who ruled from his throne in that city over so many realms and nations, he expatiated on the dominion and glory of an unspeakably greater and better Lord and Ruler—Prince of life, and King of kings. He showed that this Jesus was the king whom God had anointed, and who was able to order and rule the kingdom of God with consummate wisdom and power. The Roman Emperor was indeed an impersonation of human pride and self-will; but this Ruler over the kingdom of God was and is the bright expression of the Divine will, which is good-will to men. He is Lord to the glory of God the Father.

So the earnest apostle taught the live long day in that primitive St Paul's cathedral—"his own hired house;" and the day's labour was not in vain. Some of the Jews were persuaded by the exposition and argument, and, it is to be presumed, cast in their lot with the Christians at Rome, and often repaired to St Paul's house for further instruction and for prayer. But some were not convinced; and in the evening the assembly broke up with discordant views and feelings; not, however, before the apostle pronounced a heavy reproof on the blindness of the Jews, and intimated that the salvation would be preached, and with more success, to the Gentiles. The close of his address to the Jews at Rome resembled the close of his speech to the Jews and proselytes at Pisidian Antioch. The circumstances were very similar, but the occasion at Rome was for obvious reasons the more critical for the Jews themselves, and for the future attitude of Israel towards the New Testament truth and liberty. At Antioch St Paul concluded with a warning from the book of Habakkuk. At Rome he quoted from the sixth chapter of Isaiah in the Greek version. The infatuation of Israel in the old times when

prophets brought messages from Jehovah and were not heeded now reappeared in a more intense and fatal form, when the testimony regarding the kingdom of God, and the teaching concerning the Lord Jesus was brought to their ears, and they would not believe. As the prophesying in a former age, so the preaching now only served to stupify and blind the Jews more and more, through the grossness and hardness of their hearts.

St Paul had made proof of this infatuation on the part of his kinsman after the flesh in many cities—in Antioch, Iconium, Thessalonica, Corinth, Ephesus, and Jerusalem. Now he saw it in Rome also. He must have often traced in his own mind the correspondence between this and the obduracy which the ancient prophets had so much lamented and reproved; and now with a heavy heart he recognised that Israel was surpassing all its former inveteracy, by closing its eyes and hardening its heart against the Gospel of Christ. True; he was aware that the falling away of the Jews at that time from the knowledge and favour of God did not involve the final rejection of the nation. He had already treated of that subject in his

Epistle to the Romans. He had given reasons for clinging firmly to the hope that the chosen nation will ultimately be recovered to God, and all Israel be saved. But, by the quotation from Isaiah, which he sounded in the ears of the unbelieving Jews at Rome, he indicated the position into which the people so long favoured by heaven must fall through their persistence in refusing the apostolic testimony, and the opening of those "times of the Gentiles," during which Israel which was nigh to God is far off, and nations which were far from God are brought nigh.

With what deep emotion, what grief at heart, must Paul as a Hebrew of the Hebrews, have spoken these parting words! He had more than the natural chagrin of a clear thinker and teacher who perceives that the minds of his hearers are shut against him, and all his exposition and reasoning are thrown away. He had the vexation of a son of Israel, who was obliged for the truth's sake to separate from the leaders of the synagogues, and to see them with the bulk of the Jewish people turn away from him as from a false Rabbi or a renegade. No Israelite ever loved Israel more

than Paul of Tarsus did. Yet he had to pronounce on his nation a woe which has now lasted more than eighteen hundred years. So far as Judaism is religious now, it is a dry sapless thing, pervaded by a tone of monotony and melancholy, with no power or desire to propagate itself. But, to a large extent, it is an irreligious and unspiritual thing in the modern world—its heart made gross by worldliness, and its influence closely allied with the growth of rationalism.

No sinister feeling of triumph touched the apostle as he made known to those unbelieving Jews the fate which was befalling their nation. He had long foreseen this as a likely issue; he fought against it to the last moment; and the perception that it was now inevitable caused him poignant sorrow and unceasing pain at his heart. Such pain, such sorrow, lies in a measure on the heart of every Hebrew Christian in the world to-day, as he thinks of his own nation, so separate, so indestructible, so unique, and yet spiritually so infatuated and hardened—their hearts waxed gross, their ears dull, and their eyes closed.

Gentile Christians but imperfectly enter into

this feeling. They are apt to be not sorry so much as indignant at the bitter and prolonged hostility of the Jews to the Lord Jesus, and the testimony of His holy apostles. Martin Luther had much of the evangelical thoroughness and fervour of St Paul, and Gentile as he was, felt deep concern at the opposition of the Jews in Germany to the Gospel. At first he cherished a hope that when the Reformation had exhibited to them a Christianity purged from image worship and other heathen practices, they would be drawn to the faith which he and his co-reformers professed. In this expectation he was quite disappointed, and then he showed how far he fell short of St Paul, not only in Jewish feeling, but in Christian patience, for he broke out in severe invective against the German Jews, and called for violent measures against them.

Violent measures, however, taken with any people or class of men on the score of their religion, are, as all intelligent persons now know and admit, wrong and ineffective. The case of the Jews requires firm argument, but also great patience. It is our duty to bear witness to them, as some of their race bore

witness to the ancestors of the present Gentile nations long ago. As we have opportunity we are to show them the kingdom of God, and the claims of the Lord Jesus Christ out of their own Scriptures—but with much long-suffering, for their hearts really are gross, and their eyes and ears shut against such truth as we inculcate. Even if we had all the scriptural knowledge of St Paul, and all his yearning sympathy, we should still have disappointments in preaching to Jews; but let us learn from him the right temper and attitude of the Church towards desolate and scattered Israel—praying for Israel, warning Israel, offering to show to Israel the fulfilment in our Lord Jesus Christ of ancient hopes and promises; and however long the time of obduracy, waiting with far-stretching hope for the day of restoration—the healing of the chosen nation, and the joy and peace of Jerusalem.

A sad sight this after St Paul's all-day teaching—hearers going hardened away! A rather mournful close to our study of the apostolic speeches! But it really is a sight which too probably the angels see at the close of every public discourse on the truth of the Gospel.

Lamentations are being made over the neglect of many to go to the house of prayer and instruction when the doors are open. It seems to us a more sad thing still, that so many enter in and hear the Gospel, and then go out just as they entered—without conviction, without faith. Some believe; howbeit some believe not.

In ninety-nine cases out of a hundred, the reason of this unbelief is not intellectual but moral. Men resist impression and submission to the truth because they wish still to follow their own pleasures, and they love the world. They come and hear the Word because others come and hear; but they shut the avenues of conviction, and bar the door at which Christ might enter. Thus they repeat the sin of those Jews who went away from the ministry of St Paul unbelieving, and they do it with less excuse.

CONCLUSION.

WE do not dispute that St Luke's history may have been written with an irenical purpose. St Paul to whom he was strongly attached had been more perversely misrepresented, and assailed than any one of the servants of Christ; and therefore he wrote to exhibit the harmony of St Paul's Christianity with that of the earlier apostles, as well as the process by which he had been led to take a wider scope of thought and ministry, and the wise resolution with which he had rescued the Church from the trammels of Jewish restriction. The book of the Acts of the Apostles tells us exactly what it is indispensable for us to know in order to understand and appreciate the epistles which follow. It is a wonderful tale, well told; and all the more satisfactory that it allows the apostles Peter and Paul to speak for themselves, and so allows us to catch their sentiments in

their own words, while we seem to see their gestures and hear their tones.

It is of some importance to remember that our holy religion originated in a spoken not a written Word. In the days of old, God spoke to Abraham, to Moses, and to the prophets; and they spoke what He spoke to and through them. The record of those words was an after arrangement for the preservation of the truth so revealed, and its transmission in an authentic form to future generations. We open the New Testament, and find John the Baptist preaching, not writing, then our Saviour speaking such words as mere man spake, not writing—projecting Himself orally on the world which He would save, and leaving it to others to put those words on record. So the Church began with and by the word of God—an oral testimony not a written book. Christ spoke; then His apostles and prophets spoke. At least a score of years passed before the primitive Church had any authorised written report of those sayings and discourses. The word of the Lord which grew and multiplied was the word spoken by those who had the mind of Christ. It was "the word of good tidings preached,"

and to be preached, to every creature. After the Church was formed, some of the more important speeches of the apostles were put on record by St Luke, and several of the apostles themselves wrote or dictated letters which have been reverently preserved, for the admonition and edification of the saints.

This original characteristic our religion cannot afford to lose. It may be greatly served by the pen, but it can never lay aside the sword of the mouth. Let Christian periodicals and books be ever so much multiplied, let copies of Holy Scripture be ever so widely diffused, nothing can supersede personal oral testimony to Jesus Christ and the Gospel. It is often said, and truly, that the Church needs more Power from on high, such as she received at the beginning. Rely upon it, that the Power will use the same organs and instruments as at the beginning, viz., apostolic men and apostolic speeches.

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